

NOVEMBER, 1953

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AND

# IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

NOVEMBER, 1953

35¢

## SKY LIFT

by

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN



# Introducing the

# AUTHOR



*Robert A. Heinlein*



VITAL statistics: I was born in Butler, Missouri, July 7, 1907. Graduated U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, June 1929. Served as Line Officer (mostly gunnery and fire control) in aircraft carriers and destroyers to 1934—retired that year for physical disability incurred in line of duty. Post graduate work in math and physics at U.C.L.A. Dabbled in real estate, politics, silver mining, construction—and started writing in 1939. Knocked off writing during World War II and spent war years in aviation engineering at the Naval Air Experimental Station, Naval Base, Philadelphia. Resumed writing after V-J day . . . Now living in Colorado Springs, married to Virginia Gerstenfeld — veteran, (WAVE

Lieut.) biochemist.

. . . I am a long-term optimist and short-term pessimist, being convinced that the human race, democracy, and freedom will all survive, but being equally convinced that we are in for a very sticky time of it until we liquidate enough communists to convince them of the error of their ways.

I am happy indeed to be a member of a mammalian, bisexual race and think mighty well of the human race as a whole despite the minority of jerks in it. I have no present or future ambitions but hope to live a long, long time. I do not think that mankind will destroy either itself or this planet. I am firmly convinced that the United States is the best thing

*(Concluded on Page 21)*

# IMAGINATION

## Stories

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| SKY LIFT (Cover story—5,000 words)<br>by Robert A. Heinlein.....          | 6   |
| THE TIME ARMADA (Novel—50,000 words, Conclusion)<br>by Fox B. Holden..... | 22  |
| ROLL OUT THE ROLOVI (Short—2,500 words)<br>by Harry C. Crosby.....        | 96  |
| GUARANTEED—FOREVER! (Short—4,600 words)<br>by Frank M. Robinson.....      | 104 |
| THE MUSIC MASTER (Novelette—8,000 words)<br>by F. L. Wallace.....         | 118 |
| TEST PROBLEM (Short—1,000 words)<br>by Alan J. Ramm.....                  | 140 |

## Features

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR.....              | 2   |
| FORECAST OF COMING ISSUE.....            | 4   |
| THE EDITORIAL .....                      | 21  |
| HELL-BOMB DELUXE! .....                  | 95  |
| FREE FALL PERILS.....                    | 95  |
| IMAGINATION SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY..... | 144 |
| FANDORA'S BOX .....                      | 146 |
| LETTERS FROM THE READERS.....            | 154 |
| TOMORROW'S SCIENCE .....                 | 164 |

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## Stories of Science and Fantasy

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Editor

Frances Hamling  
Managing Editor

Malcolm Smith  
Art Director

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# The ditorial



WHEN over a thousand readers take the time to write the editor of a science fiction magazine letters stating why they read science fiction, it is something to mention editorially, indeed, to wax enthusiastic over. We will!

YOU will recall the informal contest we ran in the August issue. (Details and winning letters starting on page 154 this issue.) That issue hadn't been on sale a week before the deluge began to hit. And a thousand letters to a science fiction magazine on a single issue is a deluge. The vast majority of readers never bother to write an editor—and they didn't even for the contest. But still, we're mighty pleased with the terrific response we did get.

WHAT did we learn from the letters? Quite a few things. We learned that our readers vary in age from 11 to 60, with the predominant age bracket 15-30. They are composed of students, (Grade, High, and College) clerks, farmers, doctors, lawyers, technicians, housewives, (mothers, bless them!) and a list of other vocations too long to mention. A cross-section of our American life? We think so, and we're proud of it. While the reasons for people reading science fic-

tion are more fully expressed in the winning letters, and they speak for themselves in the reader section, the preference for *types* of science fiction merit some mention here.

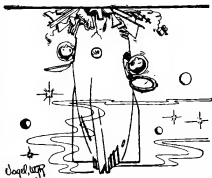
WE found that more readers prefer the *escapist* type of science fiction. That is, stories with believable characters facing personal problems amid a fantastic setting; that is, fantastic to the extent that most science fiction stories are set in other than the normal surroundings of our 20th Century. Stories with plenty of action, suspense, intrigue, and above all, *happy endings* head the list. Stories that lean too heavily upon technical problems with which the characters are not actually concerned—but the authors apparently are—will be tolerated but not liked. The same goes for the sociological stump-pounding variety. And as for those depending upon sex, sadism, and frustrating neurotic themes, the thumbs are down a mile.—Which frankly we're happy to know. We've never subscribed to the school of those who persist in attempting to cram morbidity, obscenity, and kindred seamy themes into science fiction. IMAGINATION's readers agree with us, you'll be pleased to learn. And *you* are a reader.

OUR readers draw no line of preference between straight adventure and thought-provoking plots; indeed, as long as they are fast-moving, and in good taste, they are well liked. That latter merits additional comment. Good taste. Romance is not to be ignored in any story calling for it—but keep it dignified. There's a difference between love and lust. Expletives are acceptable in the dramatic instance where a character might well have "blown his top" under emotional or physical strain; there's a difference between momentary slips of the tongue and sustained, outright vulgarity. Physical and mental pain inflicted on characters by others are the hero-villain trademark and the backbone of plot conflict. There is a difference between conflict and sadism. In essence, readers prefer wholesome stories without being prudish, intelligent stories without being snobbish, and exciting stories without being crudely sensational.

FROM an editor's standpoint, such a mandate from over a thousand readers (99% of whom have never written a letter to the editor before and thus represent the vast "unknown" audience) is of great value in formulating or carrying on an editorial policy. As far as we're concerned the foregoing bears out our own views so it is an exclamation point to Madge's policy, and in a sense an open letter to every science fiction writer: study this editorial and pattern your stories accordingly. Forget what editors want—you're writing for readers. The editors who don't

recognize this fact won't be around too long nor will their magazines . . .

WE'VE got to take a moment to let you in on some family news. Madge's managing editor—our lovely wife—has just presented us with an addition to the staff, a sweet little girl—Deborah Jeanne. Matter of fact this happened in the past five hours!—so if we sound a bit excited and perhaps more incoherent than usual you'll understand why! Since Madge is owned by yours truly, this puts a new heir in line for the editorial chair! Our first gift to Debbie will be a first-press copy of this issue bound in leather—a sentimental touch, perhaps, but then we're sentimental!—You say you want to send in a memento? OK—if every reader sends in one dollar (hah!) we'll promise you the greatest year of Madge ever! You think we're kidding? Call our bluff and see! With this prospect in mind we shall retire proudly to our counting den until next month. . . . wh



"Now we know how far is up!"





# SKY LIFT

*By*

*Robert A. Heinlein*

**A sudden epidemic on Pluto threatened to destroy the Earth colonists unless medical aid arrived. Rocketships were too slow; this was a job for two Torch Pilots who were expendable!**

“**A**LL torch pilots! Report to the Commodore!” The call echoed through Earth Satellite Station.

Joe Appleby flipped off the shower to listen. “You don’t mean me,” he said happily, “I’m

on leave—but I’d better shove before you change your mind.”

He dressed and hurried along a passageway. He was in the outer ring of the Station; its slow revolution, a giant wheel in the sky, produced gravity-like force

against his feet. As he reached his room the loudspeakers repeated, "All torch pilots, report to the Commodore," then added, "Lieutenant Appleby, report to the Commodore." Appleby uttered a rude monosyllable.

The Commodore's office was crowded. All present wore the torch, except a flight surgeon and Commodore Berrio himself, who wore the jets of a rocketship pilot. Berrio glanced up and went on talking: "—the situation. If we are to save Proserpina Station, an emergency run must be made out to Pluto. Any questions?"

No one spoke. Appleby wanted to, but did not wish to remind Berrio that he had been late. "Very well," Berrio went on. "Gentlemen, it's a job for torch pilots. I must ask for volunteers."

Good! thought Appleby. Let the eager lads volunteer and then adjourn. He decided that he might still catch the next shuttle to Earth. The Commodore continued, "Volunteers please remain. The rest are dismissed."

Excellent, Appleby decided. Don't rush for the door, me lad. Be dignified—sneak out between two taller men.

No one left. Joe Appleby felt swindled but lacked the nerve to start the exodus. The Commodore said soberly, "Thank you, gentlemen. Will you wait in the

wardroom, please?" Muttering, Appleby left with the crowd. He wanted to go out to Pluto someday—sure!—but not now, not with Earthside leave papers in his pocket.

He held a torcher's contempt for the vast distance itself. Older pilots thought of interplanetary trips with a rocketman's bias, in terms of years—trips that a torch ship with steady acceleration covered in days. By the orbits that a rocketship must use the round trip to Jupiter takes over five years; Saturn is twice as far, Uranus twice again, Neptune still farther. No rocketship ever attempted Pluto; a round trip would take more than ninety years. But torch ships had won a foothold even there: Proserpina Station—cryology laboratory, cosmic radiation station, parallax observatory, physics laboratory, all in one quintuple dome against the unspeakable cold.

Nearly four billion miles from Proserpina Station Appleby followed a classmate into the wardroom. "Hey, Jerry," he said, "tell me what it is I seem to have volunteered for?"

Jerry Price looked around. "Oh, it's the late Joe Appleby. Okay, buy me a drink."

A radiogram had come from Proserpina, Jerry told him, reporting an epidemic: "Larkin's di-



sease." Appleby whistled. Larkin's disease was a mutated virus, possibly of Martian origin; a victim's red-cell count fell rapidly, soon he was dead. The only treatment was massive transfusions while the disease ran its course. "So, m'boy, somebody has to trot out to Pluto with a blood bank."

Appleby frowned. "My pappy warned me. 'Joe,' he said, 'keep your mouth shut and never volunteer.'"

Jerry grinned. "We didn't exactly volunteer."

"How long is the boost? Eighteen days or so? I've got social obligations Earthside."

"Eighteen days at one-g—but this will be higher. They are running out of blood donors."

"How high? A g-and-a-half?"

Price shook his head. "I'd guess two gravities."

"Two g's!"

"What's 'hard about that? Men have lived through ten."

"Sure, for a short pull-out—not for days on end. Two g's strains your heart if you stand up."

"Don't moan, they won't pick you—I'm more the hero type. While you're on leave, think of me out in those lonely wastes, a grim-jawed angel of mercy. Buy me another drink."

Appleby decided that Jerry was right; with only two pilots needed he stood a good chance of

catching the next Earth shuttle. He got out his little black book and was picking phone numbers when a messenger arrived. "Lieutenant Appleby, sir?" Joe nodded.

"The-Commodore's-compliments-and-will-you-report-at-once,-sir?"

"On my way." Joe caught Jerry's eye. "Who is what type?"

Jerry said, "Shall I take care of your social obligations?"

"Not likely!"

"I was afraid not. Good luck, boy."

WITH Commodore Berrio was the flight surgeon and an older lieutenant. Berrio said, "Sit down, Appleby. You know Lieutenant Kleuger? He's your skipper. You will be co-pilot."

"Very good, sir."

"Appleby, Mr. Kleuger is the most experienced torch pilot available. You were picked because medical records show you have exceptional tolerance for acceleration. This is a high-boost trip."

"How high, sir?"

Berrio hesitated. "Three and one-half gravities."

Three and a half g's! That wasn't a boost—that was a pull-out. Joe heard the surgeon protest, "I am sorry, sir, but three gravities is all I can approve."

Berrio frowned. "Legally, it's up to the captain. But three hundred lives depend on it."

Kleuger said, "Doctor, let's see that curve." The surgeon slid a paper across the desk; Kleuger moved it so that Joe could see it. "Here's the scoop, Appleby—"

A curve started high, dropped very slowly, made a sudden "knee" and dropped rapidly. The surgeon put his finger on the "knee." "Here," he said soberly, "is where the donors are suffering from loss of blood as much as the patients. After that it's hopeless, without a new source of blood."

"How did you get this curve?" Joe asked.

"It's the empirical equation of Larkin's disease applied to two hundred eighty-nine people."

Appleby noted vertical lines each marked with an acceleration and a time. Far to the right was one marked: "1 g—18 days." That was the standard trip; it would arrive after the epidemic had burned out. Two gravities cut it to twelve days seventeen hours; even so, half the colony would be dead. Three g's was better but still bad. He could see why the Commodore wanted them to risk three-and-a-half kicks; that line touched the "knee", at nine days fifteen hours. That way they could save almost everybody . . . but, oh, brother!

The time advantage dropped off by inverse squares. Eighteen days required one gravity, so nine days took four, while four-and-a-half

days required a fantastic sixteen gravities. But someone had drawn a line at "16 g.—4.5 days". "Hey! This plot must be for a robot-torch—that's the ticket! Is there one available?"

Berrio said gently, "Yes. But what are its chances?"

Joe shut up. Even between the inner planets robots often went astray. In four-billion-odd miles the chance that one could hit close enough to be caught by radio control was slim. "We'll try," Berrio promised. "If it succeeds, I'll call you at once." He looked at Kleuger. "Captain, time is short. I must have your decision."

Kleuger turned to the surgeon. "Doctor, why not another half gravity? I recall a report on a chimpanzee who was centrifuged at high g for an amazingly long time."

"A chimpanzee is not a man."

Joe blurted out, "How much did this chimp stand, Surgeon?"

"Three and a quarter gravities for twenty-seven days."

"He *did*? What shape was he in when the test ended?"

"He wasn't," the doctor grunted.

Kleuger looked at the graph, glanced at Joe, then said to the Commodore, "The boost will be three and one-half gravities, sir."

Berrio merely said, "Very well, then. Hurry over to sick bay. You haven't much time."

FORTY-SEVEN minutes later they were being packed into the scout torchship *Salamander*. She was in orbit close by; Joe, Kleuger, and their handlers came by tube linking the hub of the Station to her airlock. Joe was weak and dopy from a thorough washing-out plus a dozen treatments and injections. A good thing, he thought, that light-off would be automatic.

The ship was built for high boost; controls were over the pilots' tanks, where they could be fingered without lifting a hand. The flight surgeon and an assistant fitted Kleuger into one tank while two medical technicians arranged Joe in his. One of them asked, "Underwear smooth? No wrinkles?"

"I guess."

"I'll check." He did so, then arranged fittings necessary to a man who must remain in one position for days. "The nipple left of your mouth is water; the two on your right are glucose and bouillon."

"No solids?"

The surgeon turned in the air and answered, "You don't need any, you won't want any, and you mustn't have any. And be careful in swallowing."

"I've boosted before."

"Sure, sure. But be careful."

Each tank was like an over-sized

bathtub filled with a liquid denser than water. The top was covered by a rubbery sheet, gasketed at the edges; during boost each man would float with the sheet conforming to his body. The *Salamander* being still in free orbit, everything was weightless and the sheet now served to keep the fluid from floating out. The attendants centered Appleby against the sheet and fastened him with sticky tape, then placed his own acceleration collar, tailored to him, behind his head. The surgeon came over and inspected. "You okay?"

"Sure."

"Mind that swallowing." He added, "Okay, Captain. Permission to leave your ship, sir?"

"Certainly. Thank you, Surgeon."

"Good luck." He left with the technicians.

The room had no ports and needed none. The area in front of Joe's face was filled with screens, instruments, radar, and data displays; near his forehead was his eyepiece for the coelostat. A light blinked green as the passenger tube broke its anchors; Kleuger caught Joe's eye in a mirror mounted opposite them. "Report, Mister."

"Minus seven minutes oh four. Tracking. Torch warm and idle. Green for light-off."

"Stand by while I check orientation." Kleuger's eyes disappeared

into his coelostat eyepiece. Presently he said, "Check me, Joe."

"Aye aye, sir." Joe twisted a knob and his eyepiece swung down. He found three star images brought together perfectly in the cross hairs. "Couldn't be better, Skipper."

"Ask for clearance."

"Salamander to Control—clearance requested to Proserpina. Automatic light-off on tape. All green."

*"Control to Salamander. You are cleared. Good luck!"*

"Cleared, Skipper. Minus three . . . double oh!" Joe thought morosely that he should be half way to Earth now. Why the hell did the military always get stuck with these succor-&-rescue jobs?

When the counter flashed the last thirty seconds he forgot his foregone leave. The lust to travel possessed him. To go, no matter where, anywhere . . . go! He smiled as the torch lit off.

Then weight hit him.

AT three and one-half gravities he weighed six hundred and thirty pounds. It felt as if a load of sand had landed on him, squeezing his chest, making him helpless, forcing his head against his collar. He strove to relax, to let the supporting liquid hold him together. It was all right to tighten up for a pull-out, but for a long boost one

must relax. He breathed shallowly and slowly; the air was pure oxygen, little lung action was needed. But he labored just to breathe. He could feel his heart struggling to pump blood grown heavy through squeezed vessels. This is awful! he admitted. I'm not sure I can take it. He had once had four g for nine minutes but he had forgotten how bad it was.

"Joe! Joe!"

He opened his eyes and tried to shake his head. "Yes, Skipper." He looked for Kleuger in the mirror; the pilot's face was sagging and drawn, pulled into the mirthless grin of high acceleration.

"Check orientation!"

Joe let his arms float as he worked controls with leaden fingers. "Dead on, Skipper."

"Very well. Call Luna."

Earth Station was blanketed by their torch but the Moon was on their bow. Appleby called Luna tracking center and received their data on the departure plus data relayed from Earth Station. He called figures and times to Kleuger, who fed them into the computer. Joe then found that he had forgotten, while working, his unbearable weight. It felt worse than ever. His neck ached and he suspected that there was a wrinkle under his left calf. He wiggled in the tank to smooth it, but it made it worse. "How's she look, Skipper?"

"Okay. You're relieved, Joe. I'll take first watch."

"Right, Skipper." He tried to rest—as if a man could when buried under sand bags. His bones ached and the wrinkle became a nagging nuisance. The pain in his neck got worse; apparently he had wrenched it at light-off. He turned his head, but there were just two positions—bad and worse. Closing his eyes, he attempted to sleep. Ten minutes later he was wider awake than ever, his mind on three things, the lump in his neck, the irritation under his leg, and the squeezing weight.

Look, bud, he told himself, this is a long boost. Take it easy, or adrenalin exhaustion will get you. As the book says, "*The ideal pilot is relaxed and unworried. Sanguine in temperament, he never borrows trouble.*" Why, you chair-warming so-and-so! Were you at three and a half g's when you wrote that twaddle?

Cut it out, boy! He turned his mind to his favorite subject—girls, bless their hearts. Such self-hypnosis he had used to pass many a lonely million miles. Presently he realized wryly that his phantom harem had failed him. He could not conjure them up, so he banished them and spent his time being miserable.

He awoke in a sweat. His last dream had been a nightmare that

he was headed out to Pluto at an impossibly high boost.

My God! So he was!

The pressure seemed worse. When he moved his head there was a stabbing pain down his side. He was panting and sweat was pouring off. It ran into his eyes; he tried to wipe them, found that his arm did not respond and that his fingertips were numb. He inched his arm across his body and dabbed at his eyes; it did not help.

He stared at the elapsed-time dial of the integrating accelerograph and tried to remember when he was due on watch. It took a while to understand that six and a half hours had passed since light-off. He then realized with a jerk that it was long past time to relieve the watch. Kleuger's face in the mirror was still split in the grin of high g; his eyes were closed. "Skipper!" Joe shouted. Kleuger did not stir. Joe felt for the alarm button, thought better of it. Let the poor goop sleep!

But somebody had to feed the hogs—better get the clouds out of his brain. The accelerometer showed three and a half exactly; the torch dials were all in operating range; the radiometer showed leakage less than ten per cent of danger level.

THE integrating accelerograph displayed elapsed time, veloc-

ity and distance, in dead-reckoning for empty space. Under these windows were three more which showed the same by the precomputed tape controlling the torch; by comparing, Joe could tell how results matched predictions. The torch had been lit off for less than seven hours, speed was nearly two million miles per hour and they were over six million miles out. A third display corrected these figures for the Sun's field, but Joe ignored this; near Earth's orbit the Sun pulls only one two-thousandth of a gravity—a gnat's whisker, allowed for in precomputation. Joe merely noted that tape and D. R. agreed; he wanted an outside check.

Both Earth and Moon now being blanketed by the same cone of disturbance, he twisted knobs until their radar beacon beamed toward Mars and let it pulse the signal meaning "Where am I?" He did not wait for answer; Mars was eighteen minutes away by radio. He turned instead to the coelostat. The triple image had wandered slightly but the error was too small to correct.

He dictated what he had done into the log, whereupon he felt worse. His ribs hurt, each breath carried the stab of pleurisy. His hands and feet felt "pins-and-needles" from scanty circulation. He wiggled them, which produced

crawling sensations and wearied him. So he held still and watched the speed soar. It increased seventy-seven miles per hour every second, more than a quarter million miles per hour every hour. For once he envied rocketship pilots; they took forever to get anywhere but they got there in comfort.

Without the torch, men would never have ventured much past Mars.  $E=Mc^2$ , mass is energy, and a pound of sand equals fifteen billion horsepower-hours. An atomic rocketship uses but a fraction of one per cent of that energy, whereas the new torchers used better than eighty per cent. The conversion chamber of a torch was a tiny sun; particles expelled from it approached the speed of light.

Appleby was proud to be a torcher, but not at the moment. The crick had grown into a splitting headache, he wanted to bend his knees and could not, and he was nauseated from the load on his stomach. Kleuger seemed able to sleep through it, damn his eyes! How did they expect a man to *stand* this? Only eight hours and already he felt done in, bushed—how could he last nine days?

Later—time was beginning to be uncertain—some infinite time later he heard his name called. "Joe! Joe!"

Couldn't a man die in peace? His eyes wandered around, found

the mirror; he struggled to focus. "Joe! You've got to relieve me—I'm groggy."

"Aye aye, sir."

"Make a check, Joe. I'm too goofed up to do it."

"I already did, sir."

"Huh? When?"

Joe's eyes swam around to the elapsed-time dial. He closed one eye to read it. "Uh, about six hours ago."

"What? *What time is it?*"

Joe didn't answer. He wished peevishly that Kleuger would go away. Kleuger added soberly, "I must have blacked out, kid. What's the situation?" Presently he insisted, "Answer me, Mister."

"Huh? Oh, we're all right—down the groove. Skipper, is my left leg twisted? I can't see it."

"Eh? Oh, never mind your leg! What were the figures?"

"What figures?"

"What figures?" Snap out of it, Mister! You're on duty."

A fine one to talk, Joe thought fretfully. If that's how he's going to act, I'll just close my eyes and ignore him.

Kleuger repeated, "The figures, Mister."

"Huh? Oh, play 'em off the log if you're so damned eager!" He expected a blast at that, but none came. When next he opened his eyes Kleuger's eyes were closed. He couldn't recall whether the

Skipper had played his figures back or not—nor whether he had logged them. He decided that it was time for another check but he was dreadfully thirsty; he needed a drink first. He drank carefully but still got a drop down his windpipe. A coughing spasm hurt him all over and left him so weak that he had to rest.

HE pulled himself together and scanned the dials. Twelve hours and—No, wait a minute! One *day* and twelve hours—that *couldn't* be right. But their speed was over ten million miles per hour and their distance more than ninety million miles from Earth; they were beyond the orbit of Mars. "Skipper! Hey! Lieutenant Kleuger!"

Kleuger's face was a grinning mask. In dull panic Joe tried to find their situation. The coelostat showed them balanced; either the ship had wobbled back, or Kleuger had corrected it. Or had he himself? He decided to run over the log and see. Fumbling among buttons he found the one to rewind the log.

Since he didn't remember to stop it the wire ran all the way back to light-off, then played back, zipping through silent stretches and slowing for speech. He listened to his record of the first check, then found that Phobos Station, Mars,

had answered with a favorable report—to which a voice added, *"Where's the fire?"*

Yes, Kleuger had corrected balance hours earlier. The wire hurried through a blank spot, slowed again—Kleuger had dictated a letter to someone; it was unfinished and incoherent. Once Kleuger had stopped to shout, *"Joe! Joe!"* and Joe heard himself answer, *"Oh shut up!"* He had no memory of it.

There was something he should do but he was too tired to think and he hurt all over—except his legs; he couldn't feel them. He shut his eyes and tried not to think. When he opened them the elapsed time was turning three days; he closed them and leaked tears.

A bell rang endlessly; he became aware that it was the general alarm, but he felt no interest other than a need to stop it. It was hard to find the switch, his fingers were numb. But he managed it and was about to rest from the effort, when he heard Kleuger call him. *"Joe!"*

"Huh?"

"Joe—don't go back to sleep or I'll turn the alarm on again. You hear me?"

"Yeah—" So Kleuger had done that—why damn him!

"Joe, I've got to talk to you. I can't stand any more."

"Any more' what?"

"High boost. I can't take any more—it's killing me."

"Oh, rats!" Turn on that loud bell, would he?

"I'm dying, Joe. I can't see—my eyes are shot. Joe, I've got to shut down the boost. I've got to."

"Well, what's stopping you?" Joe answered irritably.

"Don't you see, Joe? You've got to back me up. We tried and we couldn't. We'll both log it. Then it'll be all right."

"Log what?"

"Eh? Damn it, Joe, pay attention. I can't talk much. You've got to say . . . to say that the strain became unendurable and you advised me to shut down. I'll confirm it and it will be all right." His labored whisper was barely audible.

Joe couldn't figure out what Kleuger meant. He couldn't remember why Kleuger had put them in high boost anyhow. *"Hurry, Joe."*

There he went, nagging him! Wake him up and then nag him—to hell with him. "Oh, go back to sleep!" He dozed off and was again jerked awake by the alarm. This time he knew where the switch was and flipped it quickly. Kleuger switched it on again, Joe turned it off. Kleuger quit trying and Joe passed out.

He came awake in free fall. He



was still realizing the ecstasy of being weightless when he managed to reorient; he was in the *Salamander* headed for Pluto. Had they reached the end of the run? No, the dial said four days and some hours. Had the tape broken? The autopilot gone haywire? He then recalled the last time he had been awake.

*Kleuger had shut off the torch!*

THE stretched grin was gone from Kleuger's face, the features seemed slack and old. Joe called out, "Capain! Captain Kleuger!" Kleuger's eyes fluttered and lips moved but Joe heard nothing. He slithered out of the tank, moved in front of Kleuger, floated there. "Captain, can you hear me?"

The lips whispered, "I had to, boy. I saved us. Can you get us back, Joe?" His eyes opened but did not track.

"Captain, listen to me. I've got to light off again."

"Huh? No, Joe, no!"

"I've got to."

"No! That's an order, Mister."

Appleby stared, then with a judo chop caught the sick man on the jaw. Kleuger's head bobbed loosely. Joe pulled himself between the tanks, located a three-position switch, turned it from "Pilot & Co-Pilot" to "Co-Pilot Only"; Kleuger's controls were now dead. He

glanced at Kleuger, saw that his head was not square in his collar, so he taped him properly into place, then got back in his tank. He settled his head and fumbled for the switch that would put the autopilot back on tape. There was some reason why they must finish this run—but for the life of him he could not remember why. He squeezed the switch and weight pinned him down.

He was awakened by a dizzy feeling added to the pressure. It went on for seconds; he retched futilely. When the motion stopped he peered at the dials. The *Salamander* had just completed the somersault from acceleration to deceleration. They had come half way, about eighteen hundred million miles; their speed was over three million miles per hour and beginning to drop. Joe felt that he should report it to the skipper—he had no recollection of any trouble with him. "Skipper! Hey!" Kleuger did not move. Joe called again, then resorted to the alarm.

The clangor woke, not Kleuger, but Joe's memory. He shut it off, feeling soul sick. Topping his physical misery was shame and loss and panic as he recalled the shabby facts. He felt that he ought to log it but could not decide what to say. Beaten and ever lower in mind he gave up and tried to rest.

He woke later with something gnawing at his mind . . . something he should do for the Captain . . . something about a cargo robot—

That was it! If the torch-robot had reached Pluto, they could quit! Let's see—elapsed-time from light-off was over five days. Yes if it ever got there, then—

He ran the wire back, listened for a recorded message. It was there: "*Earth Station to Salamander—Extremely sorry to report that robot failed rendezvous. We are depending on you,—Berrio*

Tears of weakness and disappointment sped down his cheeks, pulled along by three and one-half gravities.

**I**T was on the eighth day that Joe realized that Kleuger was dead. It was not the stench—he was unable to tell that from his own ripe body odors. Nor was it that the Captain had not roused since flip-over; 'Joe's time sense was so fogged that he did not realize this. But he had dreamt that Kleuger was shouting for him to get up, to stand up—"Hurry up, Joel!" But the weight pressed him down.

So sharp was the dream that Joe tried to answer after he woke up. Then he looked for Kleuger in the mirror. Kleuger's face was much the same, but he knew with sick horror that the captain was dead.

Nevertheless he tried to arouse him with the alarm. Presently he gave up; his fingers were purple and he could feel nothing below his waist; he wondered if he were dying and hoped that he was. He slipped into that lethargy which had become his normal state.

He did not become conscious when, after more than nine days, the autopilot quenched the torch. Awareness found him floating in midroom, having somehow squirmed out of his station. He felt deliciously lazy and quite hungry; the latter eventually brought him awake.

His surroundings put past events somewhat into place. He pulled himself to his tank and examined the dials. Good grief!—it had been two hours since the ship had gone into free fall. The plan called for approach to be computed before the tape ran out, corrected on entering free fall, a new tape cut and fed in without delay, then let the autopilot make the approach. He had done nothing and wasted two hours.

He slid between tank and controls, discovering then that his legs were paralyzed. No matter—legs weren't needed in free fall, nor in the tank. His hands did not behave well, but he could use them. He was stunned when he found Kleuger's body, but steadied down

and got to work. He had no idea where he was; Pluto might be millions of miles away, or almost in his lap—perhaps they had spotted him and were already sending approach data. He decided to check the wire.

He found their messages at once: "*Proserpina to Salamander—Thank God you are coming. Here are your elements at quench out*—": followed by time reference, range-and-bearing figures, and doppler data.

And again: "*Here are later and better figures, Salamander—hurry!*"

And finally, only a few minutes before: "*Salamander, why the delay in light-off? Is your computer broken down? Shall we compute a ballistic for you?*"

The idea that anyone but a torcher could work a torch ballistic did not sink in. He tried to work fast, but his hands bothered him—he punched wrong numbers and had to correct them. It took him a half hour to realize that the trouble was not just his fingers. Ballistics, a subject as easy for him as checkers, was confused in his mind.

He could not work the ballistic. "*Salamander to Proserpina—Request ballistic for approach into parking orbit around Pluto.*"

The answer came so quickly that he knew that they had not waited

for his okay. With ponderous care he cut the tape and fed it into the autopilot. It was then that he noticed the boost . . . four point oh three.

Four gravities for the approach—

He had assumed that the approach would be a normal one—and so it might have been if he had not wasted three hours.

But it wasn't fair! It was too much to expect. He cursed childishly as he settled himself, fitted the collar, and squeezed the button that turned control to the autopilot. He had a few minutes of waiting time; he spent it muttering peevishly. They could have figured him a better ballistic—hell, he should have figured it. They were always pushing him around. Good old Joe, anybody's punching bag! That so-and-so Kleuger over there, grinning like a fool and leaving the work for him—if Kleuger hadn't been so confounded eager—

Acceleration hit him and he blacked out.

When the shuttle came up to meet him, they found one man dead, one nearly dead, and the cargo of whole blood.

THE supply ship brought pilots for the *Salamander* and fetched Appleby home. He stayed in sick bay until ordered to Luna

for treatment; on being detached he reported to Commodore Berrio, escorted by the flight surgeon. The Commodore let him know brusquely that he had done a fine job, a damn' fine job! The interview ended and the surgeon helped Joe to stand; instead of leaving, Joe said, "Uh, Commodore?"

"Yes, son?"

"Uh, there's one thing I don't understand, uh, what I don't understand is, uh, this: why do I have to go, uh, to the geriatrics clinic at Luna City? That's for old people, uh? That's what I've always understood—the way I understand it. Sir?"

The surgeon cut in, "I told you, Joe. They have the very best physiotherapy. We got special permission for you."

Joe looked perplexed. "Is that right, sir? I feel funny, going to an old folks', uh, hospital?"

"That's right, son."

Joe grinned sheepishly. "Okay, sir, uh, if you say so."

They started to leave. "Doctor—stay a moment. Messenger, help Mr. Appleby."

"Joe, can you make it?"

"Uh, sure! My legs are lots better—see?" He went out leaning on the messenger.

Berrio said, "Doctor, tell me straight: will Joe get well?"

"No, sir."

"Will he get better?"

"Some, perhaps. Lunar gravity makes it easy to get the most out of what a man has left."

"But will his mind clear up?"

The doctor hesitated. "It's this way, sir. Heavy acceleration is a speeded-up aging process. Tissues break down, capillaries rupture, the heart does many times its proper work. And there is hypoxia, from failure to deliver enough oxygen to the brain."

The Commodore struck his desk an angry blow. The surgeon said gently, "Don't take it so hard, sir."

"Damn it, man—think of the way he was. Just a kid, all bounce and vinegar—now look at him! He's an old man—senile."

"Look at it this way," urged the surgeon, "you expended one man, but you saved two hundred and seventy."

"'Expended one man'? If you mean Kleuger, he gets a medal and his wife gets a pension. That's the best any of us can expect. I wasn't thinking of Kleuger."

"Neither was I," answered the surgeon.

**Do You Subscribe to Imagination? See Page 162**

# INTRODUCING The Author

★ Robert A. Heinlein ★

(Concluded from Page 2)

that has happened thus far in history and I consider inside plumbing to be a more important cultural advance than grand opera—these two opinions mark me as a Philistine among all right-thinking intelligentsia. I do not consider painting which seems to have been done with a broom to be “art” and I despise sculpture that looks like mouse traps.

I consider the Sears Roebuck catalogue to be a greater literary document than James Joyce's *Ulysses* and have very little use for poetry that does not rhyme—with some reservations on that one, but not many. I prefer Gershwin to Copeland, and Bonestell to Picasso.

My life has been remarkably free from high dramatic moments and would make a very dull story.

Nevertheless I get up each morning wondering what important and delightful thing will happen that day. Usually it's breakfast.

—Robert A. Heinlein

*Editor's Note: Robert Heinlein is generally considered the finest writer in modern science fiction. His contributions to the field include numerous anthologies, pocketbooks, many foreign editions of his novels, two feature science fiction motion pictures, TV dramatizations, radio shows, stories in most of the better science fiction magazines, and appearances in many top slick publications. Rightfully referred to as Mr. Science Fiction, he has established his name in the genre as a mark of literary quality, a distinction enjoyed by few writers in their chosen fields.*

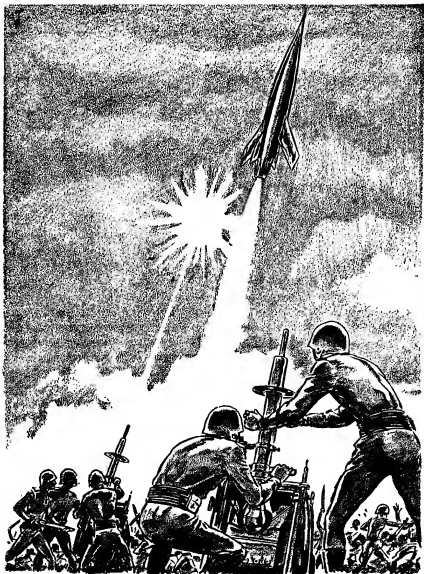
**NEXT MONTH — A THRILLING INTERPLANETARY NOVEL —**

## **THE COSMIC JUNKMAN**

**By**

**ROG PHILLIPS**

**Don't miss this story—by one of Science Fiction's top writers!**



# THE TIME ARMADA

by

*Fox B. Holden*

**Trapped on a parallel time world, Douglas Blair was playing a key role in a society which killed children to discourage wars—not knowing that his own two boys were scheduled to die! . . .**

## **(TWO PART SERIAL—CONCLUSION)**

### **WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE**

**I**N addition to being one of the most influential Congressmen in the House of Representatives, Douglas Blair also has a back-

ground as a graduate physicist from M.I.T. During his evenings home in Washington, he has been secretly working in his basement laboratory on a process for trap-



ping or "catching" light waves from the past. His wife Dorothy, and young sons Terry and Mike, are intrigued with his work, envisioning, as he explains it to them, a "historical television" invention. Blair hopes, following Einstein's theory that space is curved, that light waves must return eventually to their source; thus he expects to transfer them to a screen and actually observe great historical moments from the dawn of time.

As the story opens Blair returns home and puts aside for the moment the weighty political problems facing his troubled world to relax in the culmination of his experiment.

He gathers his wife and sons in the basement lab and turns on the machine he has constructed to trap "historical" light waves. There is a loud hum and a bluish glow—and the machine and basement vanish . . .

Douglas Blair finds himself standing beside his wife in a fantastic house, clad in equally fantastic garments. They are dazed, and Dot becomes frightened when she notices that Terry and Mike are not with them. Doug reassures her by theorizing that whatever happened has not affected the boys—they must still be in the basement at home, wondering where their parents vanished to.

Blair and his wife examine the house and the outside street from a window and see people—like themselves in similiar strange attire and peculiar vehicles that move with great speed. Blair comes to the only logical conclusion at the time—they have somehow been teleported into the future or to another world entirely. Their 1958 world is either far in the past or they are on some other planet.

As they wonder about the house they are now in—and its occupants — Blair suddenly realizes that whoever lived there must have been standing in their basement just as he and Dot were in theirs when the experiment took place; he theorizes that the occupants must now be back in their own world, as equally confused and puzzled over the transference.

To Dot their problem is a simple one; they must construct a duplicate of the machine at home, with the exact settings, and perform the experiment in this world—transferring them back to the year 1958 on Earth, and their sons—at the same time returning the occupants of this house to their own world and time.

Blair agrees with her, but he realizes the problem is not so simple; they are in an "alien" existence, knowing nothing of these people. He must feel his way



*cautiously, finding out where they are, and if they can appeal to these people for help. From what they have already noted this world is highly advanced technologically. If they don't have a machine such as he has invented, he must be careful about putting it into alien hands . . .*

*Blair and his wife take a walk to look their surroundings over. They are astounded by seeing a giant ship arcing into the heavens, and Blair instinctively realizes that he has seen his first space ship. . . . But his amazement is even greater when they come to what appears to be a local newsstand and he picks up a newspaper.*

*It is the Washington Post, and the date is April 17th, 1958 . . .*

**I***N the meantime Terry and Mike awaken to find themselves in a barracks along with scores of other ten-year olds. They believe they are home asleep and dreaming. And since dreams can be fantastic, they must accept it as such and play the dream out.*

*They are dressed in military-like uniforms and are approached by another youth who seems to know them. He addresses them as Kurt and Ronal Blair, sons of the Senior Quadrate Blair. Nothing makes sense to Terry and Mike except the last name so they accept the*

*situation, knowing that in a dream anything can happen.*

*The youth identifies himself as Jon Tayne, son of Quadrate Larsen Tayne; he is their group leader and tells them to fall in formation. They do so, marvelling at the strange surroundings—great buildings, giant space liners that are landing on a military strip, and the tens of thousands of other young boys in uniform around them. When they question young Tayne he takes for granted that they should know the obvious answers—they are preparing for the "Games" and are on Venus. They are soon issued their equipment, which they consider quite strange for ten-year olds . . . a dagger, a mace and a double-edged broadsword.*

*Douglas Blair has now learned much about the world he and Dot have been thrown into. It is a parallel-time world to their own, caused by a branching off in history at a crucial military crisis around the time of the American Revolution. In this parallel world there is no war or famine or want of any kind. It appears to be the utopia our world seeks from a technological and social standpoint. But all of this is achieved at a great price—individual freedom. Every person is a slave of the state, and the state is controlled by a*

small group of men: The Director, Gundar Tayne, his brother Quadrate Larsen Tayne, a number of other high officials—among them Senior Quadrate Douglas Blair, in charge of the Annual Games . . .

Blair is thrown into the middle of political intrigue and maneuvering, finding himself pitted against Larsen Tayne for power under the Director. Blair's years of politics as a Congressman aid him in keeping his "usurped" identity a secret while he tries to get the necessary material to construct another "time" machine. While trying to do so he discovers the true nature of the Games, the annual affair upon which this civilization depends. War is outlawed because men are conditioned at the age of ten to hate war; this is accomplished by drafting all ten year olds and taking them to Venus where they are formed into opposing armies, issued primitive weapons for hand-to-hand combat, and thrown into a battle to the death. He sees tape-records of previous Games, sees young boys killing each other by the tens of thousands . . . the survivors grow up naturally with further psychological conditioning to hate war, and thus this society is controlled "peacefully" with no over-population problem.

The horror of this situation

strikes home to Blair when he realizes that he (as the "other" Blair) is responsible for this terrible child slaughter. He realizes he must find a way out of this world before it is too late—and he worries about what the "other" Blair is doing in his own world . . .

The "other" Douglas Blair has adapted quickly to our time-world; he is superior to most men mentally, and because of his high government position as a Congressman, decides to make our world a duplicate of his own—with him in command. With skillful maneuvering (strangely opposed by his wife, Lisa who now in this new world seems to hate the things her own world stood for) the "other" Blair introduces a bill into Congress calling for lowering the draft age. Step by step he is convincing government leaders he has a panacea for the world's ills. He is waiting now for the psychological moment to introduce the Games as the only workable solution to impending war. Tragically, his deft experience as a world leader is assuring him of success . . .

In the parallel time-world, Douglas Blair, masquerading as the Senior Quadrate Blair, has tried to requisition a power-pack for his time machine. He is nearly caught, because it is an illegal request. He realizes now that his only chance

*is to steal one. But he doesn't have time to try, for he is ordered to Venus to supervise the Games, (not realizing his own sons are participants) under the watchful eye of the Director himself.*

*Blair cautions his wife, Dot, to do nothing while he is gone, and that he will allay suspicion by boarding his private space ship and leaving Earth. Once in space he plans to overpower the crew in the control room, steal a power-pack from the communications system, and return to Earth. If his timing is right, he feels he will be able to finish the machine before the Secret Police can catch him, and return to his own world.*

*Grimly, he enters the space ship and blasts off from Earth.*

*Now go on with the story ...*

## PART II

### CHAPTER XI

**A**CCCELERATION had left Doug at the brink of unconsciousness despite the hammock in which they'd secured him, but gradually the roar in his ears subsided and the words took shape, as though they were being spoken from the bottom of an empty well.

" . . . SQ check one . . . speed five-three thousand one two oh, acceleration two point one, steady

. . . trajectory minus two point oh five seconds at eight thousand two hundred, three hundred, four, five, compensate please . . . plus point oh three seconds at nine thousand, seven, eight, nine, compensate please . . . SQ at stand-by, over."

"Three-dimensional plot-check, sir. Reconciled, and steady as she blasts . . ."

"SQ to control, SQ check one, trajectory secure. Out."

He fumbled with the wide straps across his chest and hips, and his arms were awkward as though he had lost at least half of his coordination. He could taste blood at the corners of his mouth, but it was already caking to his flesh.

"Old Man had a tough time this trip, sir . . ."

"Yes. When they're desk passengers for six months running and then try to get aboard a space-deck they find it isn't as easy as when they wore an ack harness every day. The price of being eager, sergeant."

"Yes, sir. He ought to be coming out of it soon."

"We'll be locked tight on the curve when he does. Off a half-second and he'll holler like a Conservative—especially after final compensation. How close did we come to the C-limit this time, anyway?"

"Had almost a minute to spare, sir."

"Nicely done, sergea—I think I hear him trying to get the deck under him. Better get over to the trackers."

The words Doug heard still weren't making sense, but he was on his feet and had his balance. He had slid oddly down to the metal deck from the bulkhead on which the hammock was built, and he had the peculiar feeling that up was no longer up, nor down exactly where it was supposed to be. His body did not feel as though it were all of lead as he'd half-expected, although it didn't feel its usual hundred and sixty pounds, either.

He was still focusing his eyes when they saw the weird blur of color on the bulkhead above the crewman's head. Teleview screen of course—and the middle blur—Earth.

In moments he was able to see it plainly as it receded—a tan and blue mass dotted with white, shadowed to the shape of a football, hanging in what seemed direct contradiction to all the laws of physics in a great, black void.

For minutes he stood without moving, oblivious to the immaculately polished masterpiece of engineering which surrounded him.

As a video-image, what he saw could have been nothing more than

a cleverly-done stage prop, an ingenious painting by some futuristic artist. But the realization that it was real held him fascinated. Of all the human emotions, here was one that could only flounder helplessly for expression, for it had no precedent for comparison. The awe and the strangely-placid fear were intermingled with a sense of brute power; the sudden loneliness and strange humility were woven inextricably with an irrepressible consciousness of godliness, of unbounded omnipotence. And Doug knew that the first airmen had but touched a tiny edge of the sky, for here was the sky in her entirety—the infinite woman, at once belonging to man, yet an unending mystery to him, and granting of her uncountable secrets but slowly, enticingly, stubbornly.

As he watched, the tan-and-blue shape shrank gradually as though Space were tauntingly erasing it from existence.

THE interior of the compartment in which he stood had been designed with the same simplicity of line as had the ship itself, and with so smooth a compactness that it seemed to occupy more of the ship's long interior than a bare third. The two crewmen had evidently not seen him as

yet; they stood with their backs to him, their eyes intent on the long, curving banks of dials which ran the gamut of geometrical shapes. Oddly, their hands hung idle at their sides. Doug wondered if they constituted the entire crew, and if they did not, how many more of them there were.

He would let them speak first. He walked over to a panel of dials, gave them a studied scrutiny. The officer turned immediately.

"Ablast thirteen minutes, sir, at fourteen thousand miles. I believe you'll find our track with zero variation. C-limit was passed four minutes ago. Glad to have you aboard again, sir."

Doug returned the salute, nodded his head in acknowledgement of information he had no way of understanding.

"Communications effective?"

"Why—yes sir. Sergeant, prepare space-radio for message—"

"No, no." Doug waved the sergeant back to his post. "Just—checking, captain. How long since the last overhaul of your unit?"

"Why, at the prescribed overhaul date for the entire ship, sir. I believe about four months ago, sir."

"Don't you know, captain?"

"Four months ago, sir."

"I see. If I may inspect the unit, captain."

"Sergeant! Prepare communications for inspection!"

He had no way of knowing how unorthodox his procedure was, only that while aboard the ship, at least, his rank was the final law, and that they would never land on Venus. Yet, these were intelligent men, of the same high caliber as those Earth-bound in the headquarters units. He must be cautious.

Within minutes, the complex communications assembly had been bared, and its circuits were half-mystery to him. Yet the fundamentals would be the same, as they had been with the equipment he had ordered to build the second Contraption. Only the shapes, the sizes, the juxtapositions different.

"Your transmission power supply, captain—"

"The power-pack, sir?" Inadvertantly, the officer glanced at the unit and Doug followed the glance. Smaller, more compact than the best he'd seen in his own time, yet obviously evolved on identical principles. But now he had to carry the farce out, had to wring some of the freshman stuff from his memory.

"Sergeant—" He gestured toward the unit as he removed his gauntlets. "What is the v—Kempage on the plates of the final amplifier?"

"Eleven hundred Kamps at 300 milliamperes, sir."

"Very well. Suppose you give me the final power supply nomenclature!"

"Yes, sir. Genemotor, type A-26-F modified. Two hundred fifty Kemp input, eleven hundred Kemp output, at three hundred milliamperes. Two filter condensers, type L-73 new departure, one filter choke, L-12, one bleeder resistor—"

"That's enough, sergeant. Captain, upon perfunctory inspection at least, your communications unit seems to be in excellent condition. However, I suggest that after this you commit each successive overhaul date to memory."

"Yes, sir."

SO far, so good, Doug thought. Yet it was a thing of mocking irony. He was actually perfecting the act so well that one day the risk of impersonation would vanish entirely—yet now, now he must use it to its utmost to carry through a desperate plan to escape, rather than to stay. Worse, it was even a double irony, for had he sought escape at first rather than a lifetime of imposture in this next-door world, they would have helped him. Of course there were the games—he might never have learned enough in so short a time

to have gone undetected through them. It was a strangely reassuring thought; it eliminated choice. But at the same time it heightened his desperation. There was only one mark at which to aim, but it was a bull's-eye with **no** margin for error.

The captain was speaking to him.

" . . . care to check the flight-pattern coordinates? Sergeant Zukar here is quite justifiably proud, I think, of his ability to delay terminal compensation until the last fraction of a minute before C-limit is reached . . . "

"No—no thank you, captain. I am quite satisfied. I would like, however, a routine check of the remaining crew."

"Remaining crew, sir?" The captain's face was suddenly a mask of perplexity, and his features were again taut. "I'm afraid I fail to understand, sir. Unless there were last-minute orders which I failed to receive assigning two additional—"

He had discovered what he wanted, but he had been awkward . . .

"Yes, yes of course, captain. The orders for Tayne's ship. For some reason I—"

"Of course, sir."

Not a natural, but he'd made the point. But he couldn't let the

dice get cold now. Only the two of them aboard; that made it simpler. And the sergeant had said the power-pack used a 250 Kemp input, the same as the wall current at the house. Usable, then, and he had to get it back . . .

He walked slowly over to a bulk-head seat, sat down.

He groped uncertainly for the brief-tube he'd brought, let it fall with a clatter to the deck.

The captain was scooping it up in a trice, and Doug twisted the muscles of his face into a grimace of discomfort.

"Sir,—sir, is there something wrong?"

"I—no I don't think so, captain. Nervous strain, I'm afraid. I—" Another grimace.

"Sergeant: Three neuro tablets at once—"

"No, no—" Doug said. "Like poison to me." He doubled over. "Captain . . ."

"Yes sir, what can I get—"

"Nothing, I'm afraid . . . Back to Earth as quickly as possible—"

"Back to Earth, sir? But that's impossible! We're at least thirty minutes past C-limit, sir . . . the trajectory's locked. We must continue, of course."

"Must—must *continue*?"

"Why, yes of course, sir."

Doug straightened his body, but kept his arms locked around his

middle, kept the grimace on his face and feigned shortness of breath.

"Of course *what*, captain?"

A LOOK of comprehension came suddenly to the captain's face. He straightened, stood again at attention. "According to Constitutional Commandments Four, Part 3, Subsection 12 as amended July 9, 1949, part A: 'All space craft shall be robot-controlled and shall fly predetermined trajectories, save (1) when bearing members of the Science Council and/or their certified representatives, to whom manual operation and navigation at will is singularly permissible, or (2) when insurmountable emergency shall occur. All other craft shall be launched on the predetermined trajectory as hereinbefore stipulated, and shall be compensated to their true course by remote control from Earth for so long as radio impulses between ship and Earth shall be for all practical purposes instantaneous. Beyond this limit, to be hereinafter described as Compensation Limit, whereafter distance shall create a time-lag of communications and corresponding control impulses so as to make further remote control an impracticability the ship shall continue on the trajectory as last corrected under con-

trol of its own self-directing, or autorobot, units. These units will be constructed so as to be inaccessible to all passengers, including instrument and communications technicians."

For a moment Doug said nothing, let the captain remain at attention, struggling to regain his breath and composure. The man had thought the feigned sickness was simply a device to get him off guard so that his alertness might be tried with some disguised test of his knowledge of regulations. Of course that was it . . . unthinkable that any officer, any rank, should give such an order as he had given for actual execution.

Funny, how the twists saved you when there was no longer any point in being saved. He was trapped here—trapped, and on Venus the trap would tighten and finally close when Tayne found some opening in his guard and plunged through it.

"Well done, captain. As you were. Your qualifications seem quite adequate. See to it that they are continually maintained."

"Yes, sir."

With what nonchalance he could muster, Doug dropped the sickness act as though it had been a trick the captain might have expected, and opened the brief-tube. He would have to memorize every

word of its contents, every direction on the plastic sheets it contained. If he wanted to see his own home again—for that matter, if he ever wanted to see Dot again, he would have to run a bluff that would, he mused, even amaze the United States Bureau of Internal Revenue.

And that, he knew, would be damn near impossible.

## CHAPTER XII

AFTER Doug had gone, Dot tried to make herself forget why he had gone, where he was going. She wanted the old conviction to come back; she wanted to be smugly sure again that it was impossible for him to fly to another planet, and that what he had said was just a great joke.

She twisted a dial on the luxurious radio console, sat for a moment beside it and wished that she could as easily twist fact away from belief, so that the awful fear would go. Yet blindness to fact was no answer to fear of it.

It seemed long ago that space flight had been something for light dinner-table conversation, something for fanciful conjecture in an idle moment, something to discuss politely when the overimaginative person became serious with his day-after-tomorrow talk.



But now suddenly it was none of those things. Now suddenly it was a thing of life or death to her; it was real, and she was afraid. The science-fiction stories she had leafed through in an idle moment—what had their writers said? What had they, in their irrepressible way, so logically theorized about the balance of life in the impossibly deep reaches of Space—about the precocious ships that men would some day build when they were at last free of their age-old fear of infinity?

The soft music from the radio had stopped, and the newscaster's voice disturbed her reverie.

" . . . this afternoon, the Prelatinate announced eight new amendments to the Constitutional Commandments, making the total for the day so far a slightly-under-average twelve. This afternoon's amendments deal specifically with Commandment Ninety-three, Section 189, Chapter 914, paragraph 382, sub-rovision 2103-K. The first stipulates . . . "

She tried to find another program of music, but the daily amendment announcements were everywhere. With a fleeting smile she remembered what Doug had said—that at last the commercial had met its match as an instrument for ruining radio listening. Yet logical enough, for here the

dollar was secondary, and Government was God.

She turned the console off, and again the house was quiet, and the chill mantle of worry drew closer about her brain, grew steadily into a stifling strait-jacket of helpless fear. Lord, there was nothing she could *do* . . .

Then of a sudden her pulse was racing as the large helicopter landed at the side of the house. She looked out the window.

But it was not Doug. The word ELECTROSUPPLY was stenciled in large letters above the craft's opening freight-door, and she watched as a dolly was lowered from it. There were four men, and they were unloading a large crate. It went on the dolly, and then the dolly with its load was being pushed by the four to the side of the house.

The door-signal sounded.

"Yes?"

"Madame Blair, would you please sign for the shipment?"

"Yes, of course. But what is it that I—"

"Sorry, Madame. Only the Order Division knows the nature of the consignment — policy, you know. There, that'll do it. Thank you."

HE left with her permission to leave the crate in the cellar,

and after a few minutes the 'copter and its efficient crew was gone.

She knew intuitively that it was the equipment he needed so desperately—ironically enough it must be that. She had to fight back the impulse to rush to the cellar and rip the crate open. For if in some way she should slip, do something wrong, damage what was inside . . .

Quite suddenly her thoughts were marshaled from their uninhibited adventuring and became sharp hard-edged instruments. Even the tiniest error now could mean the difference between winning and losing, and it was still not too late to win.

A message to him through his office, but it must be contrived somehow so that they could not suspect that she was telling him he must return immediately. She could simply say something like "as per your instructions, am informing you of arrival of the last item for which you phoned. Am sure it is exactly what you wanted. Good luck, Lisa." That should work—

But the telecall signal sounded before she could pick the slender unit from its cradle.

"Yes?"

"Madame Blair?" It was a woman's voice.

"Why yes, speaking."

"This is Madame — Doe. We missed you at the culture lecture yesterday afternoon my dear, and just wanted to make sure that everything was—all right, you know."

"The lecture—oh, yes of course. Why I'm sorry—"

"But everything is — all right? You're not ill?"

"Oh, no. It just must have been one of my usual oversights," Dot bluffed. And she knew there was something missing. In the woman's voice. Something . . .

"Oversights?"

"Why, yes—I'm afraid so. Dreadfully sorry. But of course I'll try not to forget next time."

"But Madame Blair—" and then suddenly the tone changed. "Yes, I know how it is—we all have those days, don't we? Well, there's something you really should know, so don't forget our next little get-together, will you?" An enchanting little giggle was attached, but there had been no giggle in the first three words.

"No, I won't forget," Dot said.

"'Til next time, then. Good-bye."

Dot hung up, and the room seemed suddenly to have become cold. Intuition was one thing—she wouldn't be a woman if she didn't trust that. But imagination was of course quite another. It had been simply an unexpected half-

minute phone-call. Short, almost too short, if she were any judge of the ladies' society type. Nonsense . . .

She sat down. And the chair was cold.

*Nerves, girl, that's all. Like the night you saw the man in the shadows outside the house and Doug wasn't home from the banquet yet, and it turned out to be the neighborhood cop waiting for his beat relief . . .*

She had to forget it, get the message to Doug. What would she say, now? "As per your instructions—"

*But Madame Blair—I*

Damn! This was ridiculous—pure imagination—since when was a culture society a thing to get goose-pimples over? That was all it was of course. Just the knowledge of the crate downstairs . . . God the house was quiet.

She reached for the phone.

And again, the door-signal chimed.

She half-walked, half-ran to answer it; tripped, caught herself. It chimed again.

Then somehow she had the door open, and there were four men in white uniforms standing before it.

"Madame Blair, if you will please come with us."

"No, I'm sorry,—I can't. Why, what are you here for?"

"You received a telecall several minutes ago, did you not, Madame?" He phrased it as a question, but she knew that it was a statement.

"Why, yes I did. A social call —"

"We know that it was not, Madame Blair. If you will accompany us please." They stood there, unmoving.

"I—I don't understand. My culture society, if it is important for some reason that you know . . ."

"Precisely. We've known for some time about the society, madame. We are sorry that we have at length linked you with it. Now if you will accompany us please."

There was no choice. She did not want to think of what might happen if she ran.

## CHAPTER XIII

"**I**NSIDE Venus compensation limit, sir. They've taken over. Inversion in three minutes; jet-down at NMHQ in twelve. Secondary check please, sergeant."

Space had been monotonous. After the first thrill of watching Earth grow smaller and smaller until it was nothing more than another planet in the heavens, after the realization that the studded blackness to each side was real, and not some gigantic planetarium

show, the trip had been a seemingly motionless thing, like high flight in a light plane at less than cruising speed. They had licked the problem of weightlessness by an artificial gravity set-up which functioned, as far as he was able to find out from the captain, on a complex system of gyroscopes—but not even they furnished so much as a tremor to the deck plates, and he might as well have been planted firmly on Earth for all the sensation there was of movement. Even when inversion began, the gyro system automatically compensated for its inertia effects, and he would have been unaware of it had it not been for the series of oral checks between sergeant and captain, captain and the base on Venus.

Then suddenly, the second planet loomed large and white—it blotted out the blackness, and then there was no more blackness, and the telescreen seemed to be swimming in pea-soup fog.

"Six minutes, sir."

The syrupy whiteness seemed limitless and for a moment Doug felt little pangs of panic, of fear that they must be falling into a great pit to which there was no bottom, only the eternity of the falling itself. Then suddenly it was above them like a diffuse, infinite ceiling, receding quickly at

first, then more slowly, more slowly . . .

There was a gentle pressure beneath his feet. The gyros had compensated to their limit and had automatically cut out, and true gravity and inertia once more were settling their grip about the sleek ship.

"Switch the screen aft, captain."

"As she blasts, sir."

Blue. Great, incredible expanses of blue in every shade of color, every intensity of pastel, forced to the bending curve of a horizon that seemed like some great arching bulwark against the heavy, stifling whiteness that was the sky. For moments he was not able to distinguish land from ocean, but then he discerned it as the midnight blue, near-black mass that undulated slowly, in long, even swells—and it was the vari-shaded, lighter area, smaller in size than the state of Connecticut—that was the northern land mass. And it was toward that which they descended. Their formation had already split and far to starboard, he saw two long darts of silver pair off to land on the planet's southwestern mass.

He drew the cloak about his shoulders, secured the decorative dress sword at his waist.

Down. As silently as had been the long drift through Space, save for the nearly inaudible rumble of

the great engine as it had checked in for deceleration. The descent was so perfectly controlled that if there was the heavy whine of atmosphere about their hull from too-great downward speed, he could not hear it. Down.

He drew on the gauntlets.

There was a gentle jar.

THEIR escort formed at once midway between his ship and Tayne's. They marched abreast, flanked by echelons of cadre officers and Quadrature Academy cadets. They marched silently toward a great, shining building that commanded the entire edge of the landing plaza. Its size alone made Doug catch his breath, yet it was dwarfed by a frozen human sea of tan-bodied pygmies, amassed before it in wave after spreading wave of superbly formed divisions. To realize at once that they were not formations of some stunted denizens of the planet, but children of Earth not yet eleven years old, was almost impossible for him although he had known, had seen the terrifying figures . . . But here were the statistics, immobile, at rigid attention, not in black and white, but in the hue of living flesh, with red blood still coursing through them. Here were what tomorrow would be the numbers—small still things, cold, impersonal,

and dead. Here was the stability factor of a people which had forged a device for peace. Here was the monument to their stupidity, the warrant for their ultimate place in infamy.

They faced the building in a long arc at the far edge of the plaza, an arc that Doug judged over a mile in length, easily 300 yards in depth. In it were the children of two full quadrants, his and Tayne's—perhaps a half-million—and the number would be matched on the southwestern mass, where Klauss and Vladkow had landed later, the survivors of their commands would be shipped here, and there would be the last battle. It had been planned that way for key psychological reasons.

After the first taste of battle, then the indeterminate time of waiting . . . And suddenly the waiting would cease, the sea-going troops at last would land, and swarm from their swift ships, clanging in droves to the attack. And the small, still dead things would mount again. Until margin was reached. Then they would stop.

Midway the length of the arc, where it was cleft by a distance of about a quarter-mile, the escort halted. It faced left. Doug and Tayne followed suit. The escort

fell back to each side, once again forming the impressive flying wedge with the two Quadrates at its point. Then, facing the fantastically pretentious edifice looming silently before them, the great assemblage waited, the mute silence broken only by the rustling sound of a half-million sword-sheaths as they swung gently in the warm gentle breeze.

Gradually, then, the sound grew. A rumble like far-off thunder was above them, and it mounted slowly to a vibrant roar. The milk-white sky suddenly swirled as if in indecision, then was ripped asunder, and torn tendrils of it groped to fill the gaping rent in it as a great, silver shape plunged through, descended on a seething pillar of flame.

It landed atop the building itself. It was like a towering, silver spire there, as though to become an integral fixture to transform the sprawling Colossus from administrative nerve-center to the temple of empire. Doug's own ship beside it would have been as a sloop to a battleship. He knew that in a moment the main port of the flagship would open, and through it would be escorted the Prelate General himself.

A half-million pairs of ears were tuned sharply to hear the voice of their God. And when it had

thrown them into conflict here, the mighty ship would rise and vanish as it had come, to bear its high priest to the southwest, where the lesson would be read for the second, and final time.

DOUG tensed, knowing as he did from sleepless study what was to come. Suddenly, from well-concealed amplifiers through which the Prelate General's voice would soon sound, there were the first thunderous strains of The Battle Hymn To Peace. Doug whirled, faced Tayne.

"Quadrants to salute!"

Tayne pivoted.

"Division leaders, give your divisions present arms!"

A hundred cadets about-faced in turn, bawled in unison "*Regimental sachsens, give your regiments present arms!*"

And the command was passed in swelling unison from regiment to battalion, battalion to company, and the timing had been perfect. As the surging hymn of hysteria struck its climaxing strain, a cacophony of two thousand young voices swelled hysterically above it— " . . . PRE-SENT—ARMS!"

There was a piercing shriek of sound as 500,000 broadswords whipped from their scabbards, glittered like the teeth of some Hell-spawned, pulsating monster as they

flashed in salute.

And Doug sickened. For he had seen it before, and only the sound had been different. There had been the resounding slap of taut rifle-slugs against the wood of polished stocks . . .

The terrible music ended on a measure of rolling drums, and the command was relayed for order arms. There was the crash of a half-million blades slammed home in their scabbards as one, and then the silence fell as though some great impenetrable curtain had fallen.

The Prelatine General, borne in a highly-polished sedan chair of lightweight metal on the shoulders of the colorfully-uniformed members of the Inner Prelatine, appeared in the pocket-like balcony which was dwarfed only by the immensity of the building itself. Visible only as a jewel-encrusted shadow behind the transparent metal enclosure in which he was ensconced, he began his speech. The two quadrants stood again as statues.

"Once again, for the glory of the highest order of life and with the blessing of the Prelatine Saints, we unite to do battle for the salvation of Man. May our mission be one of success."

A great rolling murmur of sound swelled from the throats of the half-million, subsided . . . The word

was undistinguishable, but Doug knew what it was. They had said "*Amen.*"

"Our sacred duty to the One World, to the Universal State is before us, and handed down to us by the will of the people as they worship in their countless community senates, we shall discharge it without fear, and for the love of our way of life. Sobeit.

"It behooves us all, as children of a mighty government, to believe without contest in the inviolate concepts upon which our all-powerful way of living and thought is built. There have been those who were unbelievers; there have been those who would profess to debase government and political philosophy to the level of mere intellectual function and enterprise of policy, yet even those were heard to admit before paying the terrible price for their heresies that, because their beliefs were different, they must have of course been wrong.

"For those of us who aspire and pray that we may one day hold a seat in the great Quorum of the Perfectly Governed, let there be no doubt, let there be no threat to the mightiness of the glorious order which we foster . . .

"As it is to be found in the immortal words of the Constitutional Commandments, and I read from Four Chapter 18, Book of Sections,

Section 932: *'There shall be great honor to those who give of their blood that the One World shall live, and great reverence for the glorious memories of those who give of their lives that the One World shall not perish.'* Sobeit."

Once again the rolling murmur of a half-million voices. "Amen . . ."

"It is then to you that I command, go forth, and perform the duties of your great faith; go forth, for the dead shall inherit the living!"

And as at a signal, the air was rent with a deafening surge of voices strained to their topmost in a savage cheer.

**S**LOWLY then, it subsided, and the Prelatine General raised his left hand as though in half-salute, half-benediction. And again, there was silence, and the living things that were statues had lost their shape and form, and had become row upon row of symmetrically-hewn markers dotting a large graveyard on Sunday afternoon in July.

"And now, let us join minds as we listen to the ancient tongue voicing the Prelatine's Creed which has taught us to believe . . ."

And the sounds were strange, their meaning neither having been taught nor studied for the century and a half that English had

been decreed by law as the universal tongue. Doug knew that only he, of all the half-million, understood the sounds. With difficulty at first, then with increasing facility, he translated the Latin. The Latin which the others heard and obeyed. And which they had never, nor ever would understand.

" . . . believe in the purchase of everlasting peace with the blood of the young; in eternal adherence to the regime of the Prelatine because it is the sole existing concept in which to adhere; in sacrifice of thought upon the omnipotent altar of Belief to Government Almighty, and in the everlasting spirit of the Founders, to whom we daily pray for the strength to forever remain unchanged, unchangeable, despite the temptations of knowledge, progress, and human feeling: Sobeit. I believe in the infinite divinity of the two parties, and in the concept of truth as they shall dictate, rather than as it may seem to exist through exercise of mere reason; in the . . ."

The sing-song tones droned with heavy monotony through the hidden speakers, as though weaving some hypnotic spell to insure the captivity of the young myrmidons upon whose ears they fell, unintelligible, but Law.

The sea of young heads was



bowed and a million eyes were focused unmoving on the ground, for to view the heavens and to think upon their unbounded freedom, with which they sought to lure the mind away from the patterns which had been decreed for it, would be tantamount to heresy.

And then suddenly the drone had ceased. There was movement in the balcony. Two of the Inner Prelatine, cloaks swaying heavily with the weight of the precious metals with which they were gaudily embroidered, took posts as though sentinels at each side of the Prelate General's shoulder-borne sedan. The naked broadswords in their hands swung upward slowly until their tips touched directly above it. And the Latin came again, in low, swift cadences.

" . . . *You who are about to die, go forth . . .*"

And as the words were intoned, the broadswords were brought level, were swung slowly, in wide, horizontal half-arcs above the high-held heads of the regimented multitude.

"*God . . .*" Doug thought, "*God! A blessing!*"

Then the ceremony was over, and the strains of the hymn again burst forth, and Doug caught himself almost too late. He whirled.

"Troops pass in review!"

Tayne returned the salute, re-

layed the order until within seconds it was a surging, shrieking thing, the more frightening for its perfect unison. *Hysteria*, Doug thought, *by the numbers!*

He knew the plan. The ranks that formed the long arc of formations would face right, and then, at simultaneous commands, would step off to the beat of the terrible hymn, preserving the curvature of the arc so that the actual line of march would be a perfect circle nearly a file and a half at its inner diameter, with the great building as its precise center. And the ranks would be kept in perfect dress as they fanned out in 300 yard-lengths, and the cover of each endless column would be of such precision that at a command, the inner columns of each quadrature would march to the rear, and the spectacle would be one of four immense, counter-marching arcs. As they met at the opposite pole of the great diameter, the perfection of their circle would be proven.

He took his station near the edge of the inner circumference. Tayne took his, nearly a half-mile to Doug's rear. The cadre officers and Quadrature Academy cadets took posts of command at equally spaced intervals for the entire length of the arc, marching to them along invisible radii as the thousands of young section and squad leaders

shrilled their commands.

**D**OUG drew his sword then, held it high over his head, then swept it in flashing salute to the ground. And together, he and Tayne gave the first order.

"Troops march forward!"

The cadremen and cadets repeated it.

*"Forward—"*

And like an echo bounding its way into infinity, the word magnified into an undistinguishable roar.

*"MARCH!"*

The throbbing hymn was again at its climax, and the volume of sound was so great about him that the tiny shrill note which his ear had singled out for the briefest instant could only have been in his subconscious. Yet for a split-second, it had been by itself, for it had been out of timing with the rest. And it had been near him.

He would listen again, when the counter-march command was given. Impossible, of course. Unthinkable, unthinkable . . .

It seemed suddenly that the two-hour long march about the 5-mile mean circumference would take two days. The display was ridiculous and time-consuming, but he was thankful for it even as he cursed it. For he must hear the sound again. Yet if he heard it,

then the spectacle must never end.

Slowly, slowly, at a measured, tireless step the Prelate General's Review marched in indefatigable tribute.

And at length, at the half-way mark, Doug raised his sword for the command, whipped it downward.

"Inner columns march to the rear!"

The relay began.

"Inner columns as assigned, to the rear—"

And the last words were magnified to the proportion of thunder, but his ears heard it only as a faraway thing. And again he heard the near-by command, again a split-second off.

*"MARCH!"*

This time it was unmistakable. A recently designed section or squad-leader, of course, who had not yet mastered the timing of commands to perfection. Nearby. He looked desperately into the files of marching boys at his side, now muddled as the centermost columns marched to the rear. The command would not have been relayed to the outside columns, since they were continuing their march forward. Then he must quickly search the reverse column as it shuttled its obscured way to the rear.

But of course not! He would

not recognize a face, even as—as his had gone unrecognized! But the voice he had heard it three times, three split-seconds! And somehow it was, it was Terry's voice! In there somewhere—Terry, Terry and Mike! Swords and maces swinging rhythmically at their sides . . .

## CHAPTER XIV

CARL GRAYSON lit a cigarette. Senior Quadrate Blair watched him closely as he went over the last of his notes. The man was obviously disturbed, but only about the interview itself. There had not been an instant's suspicion; Blair was certain of it. The greatest danger was over. It had been a danger ever-present with first meetings but with each, it had become progressively easier with which to cope, yet with the man Grayson, there had been unexpected pitfalls. These strange people indulged in a peculiar relationship called friendship, he had discovered—in essence it was a psychological thing, a thing from which to derive a satisfying personal pleasure. In actuality, it had become a rather distorted relationship, forged as it had been into a many-ratcheted tool. Between the Congressman and Grayson, however, the relationship was genuine and—the

subtle thing which he had missed until it had been almost too late—of a partial nature. The thing called friendship was a thing of varying degree. And Grayson was a "best" friend. He had almost missed that. It was so different to stabilize things here . . .

"Doug, I want to get this straight for sure, and then I think I'll have the works. What do you mean by 'new sources of military manpower yet waiting to be tapped'? You mean simply the next UMT draft in July don't you—all the new 17-year-olds?"

"For broadcast — immediate broadcast, Carl, I shall explain the phrase by simply saying, uh—a new program of draft-age analysis and evaluation is soon expected to be under study by the Blair Defense Preparedness Committee . . ."

"Yes, but—Doug that's just a mess of words. It doesn't tell beans about . . . Oh. I get it—OK." He pushed the hat further back on his head, made a marginal clarification. It was comfortable in the small office, but there was perspiration on Grayson's wide forehead.

"You don't sound too satisfied, Carl."

"Who, me? Hell, I'm satisfied. I keep getting the exclusives, so I can't holler. I just thought some-

how you'd never get around to using that method, that's all, Doug. If you want to tell 'em, you can—and I guess you always have. But I suppose if you don't want to, but want 'em to think you have, it's as legitimate as ever to just confuse 'em. Get me. Philosopher." He completed the marginal note. "Now let's see . . . OK, OK, OK."

"Carl, how busy are you this afternoon?"

"Not, especially. Got to get this ready for my seven o'clock stint tonight and knock out the rest of next Monday's column, and then there's some of the routine junk but that can wait. Why?"

"I think I need your personal reaction to—well, to be frank about it, to a new angle the committee's got in its sights on this UMT business. I want to know what you think the radio—and the press, of course—will do with it."

"I guess I better put the pencil away?"

"Afraid so. But you'll get it first when the time comes. And perhaps you can help me decide when that should be, too."

"Shoot. All ears and no memory." He folded the uneven sheets of newsprint, crammed them in an inner pocket.

"The story I've just given you, Carl, is a lot more important than

it looks. At first glance it's just Sunday feature stuff—that's the way you'll play it in your column, and you'll probably just give it a tag-end spot on your program. And that's the way I want it played. But—it is important. I think you could call it a sort of—of a cornerstone story."

"Thinking of a series, you mean? Hell, Doug, you've got the next elec—"

"Not as a series, that's the point. Not so direct. More like a good propag—public relations campaign I mean. The development will be gradual, and not too regular—that part of it I'm going to leave up to you to some extent, I think—until it automatically becomes the top news."

"Don't get it, Doug. I've told you before what's page one and what isn't. This thing you've just given me hasn't any big names in it, anything about money, taxes, or things to make anybody good and sick at heart. This is just—well, just opinion. Thoughtful analysis. The thoughtful stuff never makes the front pages, you know that."

THE Quadrate smiled. "Precisely. I feel it should be pretty casually introduced. But don't worry—I won't ruin its news value. I think you'll agree with

me when I'm ready for the top spot on your broadcast and for the front pages, I'll have something that will—how do you put it?—make people suddenly sick. Point is, I want them to be unconsciously thinking along the right lines first, so that when they get through being sick and stop to think about it, it will make sense."

He was careful. It was difficult to maintain the curious bantering way of speech these people continually employed. An end-product, of course, of their emotional degeneration, and therefore as difficult to perfectly imitate as a provincial misuse of the language. But it was not as difficult as at first . . .

"Sure Doug—what you're talking about is done all the time, every day of the week. That part's easy enough—too damn easy. But—you keep saying 'it.' 'It' will make sense. What are you gunning at?"

"Suppose I give you an example. The final development of that statement you weren't clear on. 'New sources of military manpower yet waiting to be tapped.' What it will mean, when the time comes, is the UMT drafting of children ten years old. Thirteen at first."

"*The what?*" The man Grayson looked almost ludicrous. His mouth hung foolishly open, and there was

no sound coming from it.

"I'm afraid you not only heard correctly, Carl, but that I had better tell you that if you're thinking of sending for the booby-wagon for me, you'll have to send for about thirty others for the rest of the committee. Next week, the Blair Defense Preparedness Committee will introduce a bill for unlimited lowering of the draft age, for either war or peacetime use. Within a month after its passage—and I can guarantee you that it will be passed—the committee will give you what you'll need for your first big story on it. It will urge, and then it will demand that all male youths from the present draft age of 17 down to the age of thirteen be immediately registered for selective service."

"Good Lord, Doug—"

"The committee is strong, Carl. It is strong because I knew how to pick it. I did not pick it, I assure you, on the basis of intelligence or learning or capability. I picked it in terms of personal political and financial influence, and in terms of my capability in persuading its members to my way of thinking. That was not too difficult—they're all band-wagon men.

"But to the point. On the heels of the new Blair Law's invocation, the committee will again make a demand—registration of all young-

sters down to and including the age of ten years."

"Doug for God's sake—"

"Sit down, Carl!"

"Sure . . ."

"I'm quite sane. Worried?"

"Hell yes I'm worried."

"Take it easy. They thought a man called Litvinov was deranged once—around 1913 I think it was, when he predicted World War One, and the fall of the House of Czars."

**"B**UT you can't be serious about this—this kid business. Why my God if I think you've been—overworking, let's say, what d'you think the reaction of the man in the street'll be?"

"That, Carl, hasn't mattered for quite some time. You know it, and I know it. He's already swallowed UMT itself, don't forget."

"But—hell, the Blair Committee isn't the only bunch of politicians around here. And they—"

"I told you, Carl, my committee is strong. I picked it that way. Others can yell all they want. But no amount of yelling—even by the most widely-heard commentators and widely-published columnists—has ever really accomplished much when a particularly strong political faction has decided how things are going to be. It's the things that make you sick that have always

made the front pages, remember?"

"I—you're crazy, Doug. Crazy as a 1951 tax program. You've gotten bitter about things in the past, sometimes a little cynical. Hell, who doesn't. But you've always been the one man the people knew they could count on—and your fellow-workers, I can even add. If you try to come out with a thing like this—"

"A moment. Just a minute, Carl. I want to ask an easy one. It is really easy. How long before the next world war breaks out?"

"Easy, what d'you mean, easy? Tomorrow, next month, next year maybe. Maybe not until 1960. Nobody knows that—"

"I still say, easy. There's certainty it will be at least by 1960, and probably sooner. That's terrifyingly close enough, isn't it, when you're speaking in terms of the inevitable?"

"I see."

"The world is a pretty desperate place right now, wouldn't you say? Worse even than five or six years ago."

"Desperate, desperate—yes of course it's desperate. And you—you're going to make something of it, is that it? Doug, you're not being very original. I never thought—I never honestly thought the day would come when I'd hear you—"

"Give me a chance, Carl."

"If I do I don't think I'll ever broadcast another word of what you have to say."

"I'll take that chance. But first I'd better clear some things up. First of all, I'll tell you how much I've explained to the committee. I've pointed out to them that there is but one way open—and one way only—of offsetting the Soviets' superiority in arms production, and that's to shock the living daylight out of them. Shock them so that they'll be convinced we're—we're a nation gone mad, perhaps. As you think I've gone mad, this moment. But—what stomach would any foreign enemy have for fighting a madman, armed to the teeth with atomic weapons? They say a lunatic with a gun is a great deal more deadly than a sane man similarly armed.

"So—we shall shock them, Carl. We shall, perhaps before the year is out, not only double our own production regardless of cost, but register every kid in the country down to the ten-year age level. And have a gun ready for each one, too. As I explained to the committee, it won't be even their tremendous numbers that will be frightening. It will be the seemingly crazed desperation of the country that would consider calling them to arms that would throw the

scare. And then, of course, we'll take advantage of the scare. We'll produce A-weapons as we never have before. Hell, every parent in the nation will be breaking his back at a defense plant—not just for the ridiculously high wages that a riveter gets, but to insure the safety of their kids' skins."

"Doug, you're either really nuts or—or—"

"So much the committee knows, as of now. And, I've sold it to them. I sold it to them by simply asking them which was less desirable, my plan, or the end of civilization in a few short years. And, by asking them what other solution they had."

"Any straw—any straw at all." The reporter was not speaking to be heard, but Blair heard him.

"You've hit it precisely, Carl. It's come finally to that. Any straw at all."

FOR a few moments there was silence in the small office, and Carl Grayson just sat, staring at the floor. At length he put a fresh cigarette between his lips, lit it, and smoked automatically. It was half consumed before Doug said, "Now, I want to discuss the rest of the plan with you. The part I've not broached to the committee as yet."

"The—rest? Doug what are

you talking about?"

"The rest of it. You see, sooner or later the initial shock is going to wear off, Carl. Then, perhaps if we're lucky, we'll be evenly matched in armament and personnel under arms, but that will be all. A balance of peace is no good. You convince no one that peace is desired. You simply convince them that for awhile, there's no way they dare break it. But again, sooner or later, the dare is taken and then—"

"I want to go, Doug."

"Not yet. I want you to hear me out. And, I'm going to ask a rather special favor, Carl. Judge the plans on the merits of its logic alone. For the moment, imagine you have no emotion."

"I can, but it won't do any good. Afraid I have emotion, Douglas."

"I see. Tell me, if it is so valuable a thing as to be allowed to cloud your reasoning, why would you instantly throw it away if something called patriotic duty were suddenly thrust upon you?"

"It would shake me up a little of course—"

"Yes, but you'd chuck it. You'd perform the duty."

"All right. I don't know the tricks of debate, you do. Go ahead I'm listening."

"I'll begin this way. If, we'll say, an infantry captain realized

that by sacrificing the lives of three of his men and possibly his own, he could save the lives of his entire company, what would he do, if he were what is termed a 'good' officer?"

"Why, if that were his only alternative—"

"I assure you, it would be, for the purposes of my analogy."

"He'd—he'd save the company. That's happened."

"Even to men with emotions."

"Why—yes of course. Damn you Doug—"

"Even when one of the three to be sacrificed might be a kid who was still in high school when he enlisted—"

"Yes. Yes I guess so."

"Now remember what you've just told me, and switch to this . . . What, actually, is the basis for armed conflict between nations? Generally speaking, with the long view of history?"

"I — I suppose covetousness. Materially translated that would mean just plain wanting the grain fields, the ore mines, the sea ports, the wealth someone else has and that you no longer have, doesn't it? Land, then. Hitler called it *Lebensraum*. One outfit thinks another is stepping on its toes over this chunk of real estate or that. Etcetera, ad nauseum, ad politics."

"Good. And what's the real root



of this material covetousness do you think?"

"Grass is always greener, I guess."

"That is motive enough for the small-scale wars, yes. But I'm speaking of the kind nations fight in desperation, not merely for the sake of warring."

"Then, well—they run out of what they've got. Want more. Is that the answer you want?"

"Almost. What makes them run out, Carl?"

"Not enough stuff to take care of their population, not enough work to supply the money to buy what little there is to buy. Too many people, not enough resources to keep 'em happy."

"Now, essentially, you have it. Now, if you'll remember those two things—the captain's sacrifice and Mr. Hitler's fight for *Lebensraum*—we'll switch again. If I owed you a dollar, Carl, and gave you a bill, you'd accept it. What would it be worth?"

"Why, about—let's see—"

"No, I mean in terms of the metal backing it."

"Well—actually, it could be worthless. But as long as I don't think it is—"

"CORRECT. As long as you, and everybody else of course, has faith in it, it is of value,

and is working currency. Now one more thing. Did you ever have anything really bad happen to you when you were a youngster—say about ten years old, Carl?"

"I don't get this, Doug. You're way over me—"

"No, answer me. Think of something unpleasant that happened—"

"Don't have to think. I still get goose-pimples when I hear a near-by train whistle. Almost got killed once when my father's car got stalled on a railroad crossing. Sort of a—I guess they call it conditioning. Pretty strong with me, I guess."

"Yes. Now—we'll put the four things together, Carl. First of all, according to my plan, the world must somehow be given implicit faith in a method for the elimination of warfare. A method in which they will so strongly believe that, although the supposed reason for such belief may be scientifically quite fallacious, they will practice it nonetheless. To do this, they must be shown a method which, by one means or another, actually works. And, that is possible. There is such a method, based on the sacrifice of the few for the ultimate preservation of the many . . ."

"Go on. So far you've brought in the dollar-bill idea; the busi-

ness about conditioning, the captain and his company . . . What method?"

"Taking the drafted ten-year-olds—first of just this nation, then of the entire world—placing them once each year in four divisions in the Sahara desert, and setting them, at one another with manual weapons."

Carl turned white. He sat, unmoving, silent.

"The accepted theory will be that the horror of death by arms will create so deep a mental scar on the young plastic minds that in adulthood they will never again be able to kill. In actuality, the theory is in many respects fallacious, granted. But it will be accepted, because the practice—the desert fighting—will reduce the basic cause of warfare to flat zero, and there will eventually be no war. How? Through such a plan, many male children of course will die yearly. The number killed will be subject to strict control of course, in exact proportion to annual world birth-rate, and potential multiplication. Such, Carl, that the population of the world will, in terms of future generations as well as those almost immediate, be always stabilized. Of course, since a period of from twenty to fifty years may be needed for practice of the method be-

fore the first tangible stabilization results are shown, the 'conditioning' angle must be heavily stressed, before as well as during the actual desert fighting. Backing by the press will greatly help toward this end—you yourself know how terribly potent it can be—and I'm certain, once the method is explained to them in terms of survival, we will also be able to count on the 'corroboration' of the world's most popular scientists.

"However, as absolutely necessary insurance, an influence infinitely more powerful than those combined will be employed to positively insure unquestioning belief in the validity of the plan, not only before and during the first few years, but for all time!

"I have, therefore, already taken steps to bring it into play. I have already issued invitations to one hundred of the world's highest ranking ecclesiastical leaders for a conference here next week. By then, the committee should be rolling with quite a bit of momentum. As we said, these are desperate times . . ."

CARL remained silent. His question was in his eyes, but he would not give it speech. But Blair saw it.

"The clergy? Their assistance will be essential. I just told you

why, didn't I? You see, once they realize that they can materially contribute to lasting peace, I am sure they will cooperate. If necessary, they—all of them—would consent to a merger of church and state. History bears me out."

"The mer—"

"Naturally. How else can I make *sure* the people are made to believe implicitly in the plan until they can at least see its tangible results? And how better to maintain that belief? Government and politics and all they imply are already worshipped more than God, Carl! So let's put it on a paying basis!"

"And you think—you actually think you'll get the support of the world's clergy in this revolting scheme—"

"I told you that history bears me out, Carl. For instance—from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries, one of the world's most powerful sects was heavily involved in temporal government—because, it said, of necessity to preserve itself. And surely you must remember the cooperation of the church with Constantine and Charlemagne when their empires were in danger of disintegrating, when unity was so sorely needed, and they knew there was but one that could help them? Often the church—the sect to which I referred before

—actually took over the powers of government during Charlemagne's rule—not, perhaps, because it wanted involvement in those things which were Caesar's—but because it realized the grave perils which would face it if whole empires were to break apart, and their peoples reduced to pagan savagery as a result.

"I think you see my point. And—I imagine the simile about the captain and his platoon will also be appealing, don't you? The idea of sacrifice that others might live . . . ?"

"You—you son of a bitch!"

"I'm sorry you said that, Carl. Because the plan will work, you know. From telling it to you, I see that its shock-value is valid. From seeing your final reaction, I realize that you are inwardly as sure as I that it will succeed. It is actually all I wanted, to get your immediate reaction."

"Doug, I'm going. But there's just one thing I want to ask you before I smear you from here to damnation. Just what, Congressman, is *your* cut in this?"

"None. I have not once mentioned money."

"You're a madman, Blair."

"When you've convinced yourself of that, Carl, you may try to smear me if you wish. But first—*first, convince yourself!*"

## CHAPTER XV

AS Doug marched, he thought. There was less than an hour yet of marching to complete the great circle, to devise a plan.

Two boys in five hundred thousand. An impersonation now demanding so complex a knowledge of the situation of which it was the center that to carry it to successful conclusion would be impossible. Even a moment's belief otherwise was rank stupidity. Escape? Yes, by himself somehow, perhaps he could escape in one of the two sleek ships even now being serviced on the plaza; that had been the basis for his original plan. But the plan was junk now. Junk, unless he could find Terry and Mike first. Two boys, in a half-million!

Aircraft were being rolled out on the plaza. The immense aircraft in which he and Tayne would fly as they directed the maneuvers of their quadrants, and the aircraft of the tabulation and evacuation specialists. They were huge, and there were fully a hundred of them. But for all their size and number, they offered no hope. It was like being in a nightmare wherein one had to run for life, but the ground beneath was a sucking, miring bog.

His reason hinted temptingly that the voice he had heard might

well not have been that of his son. How many voices were there in all creation that were precise echoes of each other? Thousands? Millions, even. But among them, there was of course the *one*. And he must know. He had to know.

The Contraption. Again, what had it done? It had transmitted himself and Dot into their physical counterparts on a parallel time-track. If the blue glow of the contraption had touched Terry and Mike, then they too would have been transmitted. But because they had not appeared in the cellar when the transmission was complete, he and Dot had assumed that they had been just outside the Contraption's limited range.

That was it, of course—the cellar. That was what had thrown them off, confused their logic. Through some quirk of coincidence, the other Blair, Senior Quadrant Blair and his wife had been in their cellar at the time of the switch. Had they been anywhere else—anywhere else at all, even just upstairs, the mistake in logic would not have been made. And if Madame Blair had no sons, Terry and Mike would not have been transmitted at all. But Quadrant and Madame Blair had had sons. Two, ten years old. He remembered when Tayne had told him of their transfer from his quadrant to

Tayne's own . . . Ordered by Gungdar Tayne, Director. He remembered. He remembered how thankful he had been that they had not been his. But now—now, fantastically, they were. Because when the switch happened, Ronal and Kurt Blair had not been in the cellar. They had been on Venus.

But it was too much, the coincidences—the marriage of two counterparts; their children, same sex, same age.

And then he remembered what he had told Grayson so terribly long ago. *There's a million possible results when you go fooling around with the structure of the universe, Carl . . .*

**T**HOUSANDS of voices in the universe that were exact echoes of each other. But Terry and Mike were here, and there was no doubting that. And in Tayne's quadrate, the one beside which he was even now marching. Oh, he was doing well with his thinking! He had narrowed the field down to a trifling two hundred fifty thousand!

And he knew that by any direct means that would not arouse Tayne's too-willing suspicion, it was as far down as he would narrow it.

Indirect, then . . . Somehow,

through Tayne himself, perhaps. Tayne had his boys. Tayne's brother had seen to that, with of course no reason given. Pressure—simple pressure. Doug wondered if the pressure was supposed to break him. He wondered what Tayne's reaction would be—and his brother's—if it did not. Easy enough to guess. If his sons' deaths at Tayne's careful arrangement were not enough to break him, shatter him, make him throw down his office, then the corpses of Kurt and Ronal—Terry and Mike—would somehow end up on the battle area occupied by his quadrant, far enough behind the front lines of fighting to convince any martial court that he had violated the Director's order, had obviously at the last moment brought his sons back within his own quadrant, where they might be in some measure protected.

That was how it would be. If the pressure was not enough, then a simple frame. A simple matter of good timing. Yet if the timing should, by some miracle, go wrong . . .

*If the timing went wrong! God there it was!*

Suddenly, the blood was pounding through his body, throbbing in the large veins at his throat. Five minutes more and this thing would end. Three hundred seconds, four

hundred strides. Then the final salute as the Prelate General left as he had come. And then thirty minutes for deployment, and the games on the northern mass would begin.

But before those thirty minutes started . . . It must be done just as the Prelate General's ship disappeared into the white syrup of the sky. It must be done just before the order to break ranks to prepare for combat deployment.

And then of course it would be a gamble at best. But it was a chance, where before there had been no chance at all.

**F**IVE hundred thousand swords flashed in final salute as the Prelate General's glittering ship leapt skyward, trailing a satisfactorily impressive wake of flame and thunder as it ascended into invisibility. And the sprawling headquarters building was at once denuded of its steeple. The Director had taken his place in the balcony. Divinity had withdrawn, entrusting its mission at length to the obedient officer of its lay hosts.

The swords were sheathed. And in a moment, the Director of the games would signal dismissal.

*Now!*

Suddenly, Doug was striding from his post at the point of the flying wedge, the thin flanks of

which still joined the two quadrants, heading unerringly for a point directly before the balcony itself. And as suddenly he stopped, stiffly raised his open palm in salute. His cloak fluttered in the warm breeze.

"Your Very Grand Excellence! Senior Quadrante Blair wishes to report a suspected breach of command!" And he held his breath, but not intentionally, for suddenly breath would not come.

His salute was returned. And the field behind him was again still as though carved from stone.

"Report, Quadrante!"

He mustered all the wavering strength in his body, for each word must be crisp, clear, strong and flowing with confidence.

"Your Very Grand Excellence, it has come to this officer's attention that there exists the possibility of failure to execute a quadrant reassignment as prescribed in your command of June 3, in which Ronal Blair and Kurt Blair, identification numbers 28532 and 28533, were ordered transferred from the quadrant which I command to that of Quadrante Tayne. In order that such a failure be rectified at once if, in actuality, it has transpired, I request permission to order an immediate inspection of the units concerned!"

His muscles were rigid and his

throat felt like so much wadded sandpaper. Everything hinged on what happened now. Everything.

"In the interests of military efficiency and discipline, your unprecedented request must be granted, Quadrate Blair. I will expect, however, a full report in writing concerning the basis of your suspicion of such failure at your earliest convenience. Order the inspection; you may have ten minutes!"

"At once, sir!"

He saluted, about-faced, and strode, the single animate figure in a great open amphitheater of statues, toward the Post Tayne held behind his own. And as he walked the foreboding silence was suddenly shattered by the roar of starting aircraft engines. The tabulation and evacuation planes, readying for warm-up flights, last-minute terrain checks. There was so little time. And the Director's flat, superbly confident tone had been enough to tell him that only a naive fool could hope to win. In it there had been no trace of surprise, no trace of suspicion, no trace of hesitation. It could mean that he was already beaten. Or, there was the thread-slim chance that it meant the Director had seen no threat in the request to the subtle plan against him. For, regardless of the inspection's out-

come, the sons of Quadrate Blair would end up where they belonged, under Quadrate Tayne. And so the plan would thence go forward.

But for the record, the Director had demanded a report!

A report, Doug knew, which one way or the other, he would never write.

Somewhere behind him a flight of tab planes thundered into the air.

And then suddenly, he was facing Tayne, and it was time to play out the gamble to the end.

"Quadrate Tayne, in order to satisfy the Director and myself that the transfer of my sons to your quadrant has been effected as ordered by the Director's command dated June 3, you will order forward for inspection the unit within your quadrant to which they were assigned."

"Yes, sir."

Tayne pivoted.

"Divisions Six and Eighteen, forward—march!" Again, the familiar relay of command. Then the two great masses surged forward, one behind the other, leaving the two behind them still in formation. "Six by the left flank, march!" Six had cleared the quadrant formation, moved off as commanded to the left. "Eighteen by the right flank, march!" And Eighteen did the same. "Divisions,

halt! Six, right, face! Eighteen, left, face!" And as quickly as Tayne's commands were relayed, the way was methodically cleared for the rear rank division he called next. There were perhaps seven minutes left . . . "Division Thirty forward, march!"

AND it came forward, and Doug realized at once that in this formation, this Division Thirty, were his sons, if they were anywhere among the five hundred thousand at all.

"Division, halt!" A second flight of evac ships roared over them, and Tayne waited. Six minutes . . . "A' Company, First Battalion, Second Regiment, forward—" This time, the unit Tayne wanted was in the very front, and at once, two hundred boys were separated from a division of over five thousand, as the division itself had been picked from among forty-eight others in a quadrant of a quarter-million.

And then—

"Squad leaders Kurt and Ronal Blair, *front center!*" And from the squads of a rear platoon, two bare-torsoed, helmeted youngsters rushed forward on the double!

They halted three paces from Tayne, saluted. And to Doug, their young faces were completely unrecognizable.

Curiously pinched, worried young faces, drawn taut with the tension of bewilderment and sudden fear.

Tayne pivoted, faced Doug.

"Sir, Kurt and Ronal Blair, as assigned by command! At your orders, sir!"

Doug returned the salute, said nothing. He walked with a careful nonchalance to where the two boys, swords and maces still swinging at their sides, stood at attention. Their arms rose in salute. There was no sign of recognition in their eyes.

He dared linger near them but a moment, the fleeting moment it would take for him to identify his own sons beyond doubt. And again, it would be a matter of timing. For until the right moment, Tayne could hear every word.

"How long have you boys been in your present unit?"

"Since—since June the third I think, sir." Terry's voice. And it was Terry's way of saying words. It was Terry, and it was Mike beside him.

But he remained silent. He waited, and he prayed.

The silence drew into seconds, and it was deadly.

And then suddenly a third flight of evac ships thundered their paen of power as they fought for alti-



tude above him!

And with the prayer still at his lips lest his words be either too loud or drowned altogether, Doug shouted almost in their faces: *"Terry, Mike! It's Dad! The Contraption's done all of this! Watch for me—I'll pick you up off the field!"*

Their eyes were suddenly wide but the roar was already subsiding. He had managed about twenty quick words. He turned to Tayne. And Tayne's sword was not drawn. On his face was the masked look of hatred, but not the unveiled one of sudden comprehension. He had not heard . . .

"My sons, without doubt, Quadrate. You may order them to fall in, and reform your ranks. You shall receive my apology of record as soon as practicable."

He saluted stiffly and took his post at the apex of the wedge.

Tayne bellowed his commands for the reformation of his quadrant between the fourth and fifth ascending flights of tab and evac planes. And then, once again, there was the fantastic tableau of helmeted statues.

And through the speakers came the Director's command to deploy for combat.

**A**S their quadrants were marched off to take the field under

the ground command of the Junior Quadrates of the headquarters cadre, Doug and Tayne were escorted by an honor guard of cadets to the hangar-sections of the headquarters building where their command planes waited in the dank heat, engines idling. Huge aircraft, powerful, but not built for speed. Propeller-driven instead of jet, and the reason was obvious enough—the great, broad-winged craft had been designed for observation, not pursuit. Although there was no sign of a rotor assembly on either ship, Doug knew that for all their size, they were capable, in the thick atmosphere of Venus, of hovering at very little more than the speed of a slow human run. Everything, planned to the last detail. Every thing, irrevocably woven into the unchangeable fabric of destiny itself.

The last half of what little plan he had remained only partially within the pattern, and after that, it would simply be a race between fugitive and pursuer—a fully-committed race between hunter and hunted. Nothing more, he knew, than a desperate attempt at escape where there could be no escape. But at least there would be the brief, red-hot satisfaction of trying—there was always that, when there was nothing else . . .

It would be simple. As Senior

Quadrat, his was the duty of overseeing the campaign not only of his own quadrant, but that of Tayne, Vladkow, Klauss. His was the prerogative of flying his ship over or landing it among any of the troops, wherever they fought. He could land in any quadrant—in Tayne's quadrant. The detailed campaign maps, kept in constant conformation with each phase of the battle as it progressed by picked tabulation personnel, would show him where to land. Wherever he found A Company, First Battalion, Second Regiment, Division Thirty . . . And if the boys had understood, they would be watching, waiting. And after that, back to the plaza, the ship, with the prayer that its return trajectory was already plotted, its autorobot already reset for the return journey to Earth.

That was where he must break the pattern. That was when the hopeless, foolish race would begin.

And inwardly, Doug smiled an ironic, tight little smile. So funny, so tragically funny. A down-to-Earth, practical man like Congressman Douglas Blair, running for his life from a fantasy that could not possibly exist! As the people of Hiroshima had run on the day of the atomic bomb . . .

Their cloaks started to whip in the slipstreams of the waiting air-

craft. Another ten strides and he would have been aboard the plane.

But before he had taken five of them, the speeding surface-vehicle had drawn up beside them and stopped scant feet short of the plane's opening port. Cadremen leapt from it, swords drawn. And behind them came the Director himself.

The formation halted as though it had suddenly struck an invisible wall.

As he walked between his flanks of guards, the hulking Gundar Tayne drew his own sword. And Doug knew what the gesture meant.

"Senior Quadrat Blair, as lawful husband of Madame Lisa Blair, who was taken into custody by the S-Council of Earth at 1300 hours Earth Standard Time today, I hereby place you under official arrest. Guards! Disarm this man."

## CHAPTER XVI

**D**OUG stood motionless as his dress sword was whipped from its scabbard, snapped across the bent knee of one of the Director's guards, and cast at his feet. A second denuded him of the wide belt and narrow scabbard which had held it.

"Sir, unless you are able to cite well-founded charges for this out-

rageous action, I can assure you it will be reported to the Prelate General at once!" Doug bit the words out knowing that as a defensive threat they were hopelessly impotent, but he had to know what they had done to Dot. He had to know that even if they were to kill him within the next second. He sensed Tayne's presence behind him, could all but feel his sword-point at his back. The cadets, a moment before formed as a guard of honor, were suddenly in a bristling ring about him as though from some melodrama from the pages of Roman history. Their faces were impassive, their feet wide-spread, their swords hip-high, and pointed unwaveringly at him.

And the sneer in the Director's voice was only carelessly concealed.

"This is hardly the time for jests, Quadrate. I hardly think I need quote the Commandment subsection setting forth the law concerning the status of husband and wife when either is found guilty of heresy. Your rank permits you to deny your wife's collusion if you wish, but — unfortunately, Madame Blair has been unquestionably linked with one of the pitiful but vicious little underground groups of men and women whose constant and sole aim is not only to abolish the war games, but to ac-

complish the eventual destruction of our sacred government. She—as well as yourself, I might add—has been under painstaking scrutiny for almost a year. I am informed that a carefully guarded but all too unwise series of tele-calls to your home has at last established the necessary link. Ever hear of the Saint Napoleon Culture Society, Quadrate? No? No, of course you haven't! Quadrate Tayne!"

"Yes, your Very Grand Excellence!"

"I'm putting this man in your custody for the trip to Earth. Your orders are to deliver him in person to the S-Council—you'll take off immediately. The games will be under my personal supervision until you return. Any questions?"

"I am to deliver this man in person to the S-Council. No questions, sir."

"Carry on, then." He returned Tayne's salute with a perfunctory dip of his sword point, then sheathed the weapon and followed Doug into the waiting vehicle.

**TAKE-OFF** black-out was but momentary and wore off quickly. Escaping Venus' lesser gravity was noticeably easier, and the fog-shrouded planet still filled the viewscreen when Doug got to

his feet. He was half surprised to discover that there were no steel cuffs at his wrists, and that he had not been bound other than by the safety belts to the acceleration hammock. But it was logical enough. A robot-guided ship in Space was quite efficiently escape-proof. It had been an effective trap before, and now it was an equally effective prison. And Tayne, who had already opened trajectory compensation communications with Venus headquarters, was the one who had the sword.

Tayne's back was to him. A sudden leap—

No. With Tayne unconscious or dead, it would make little difference. His presence aboard the ship was apparently only for the satisfaction of protocol. Placed aboard it alone, Doug reasoned, he would have been as well secured a prisoner as had he been accompanied by a guard of one hundred men. It was not Tayne, but the autorobot guiding the ship that was his jailer. Yet, Tayne had not removed his sword . . .

Doug watched the white mass of Venus as it receded with torturing slowness in the screen, let it half-hypnotize him. There was something stirring uneasily somewhere far back in his brain—something, something—but it did not matter. Nothing at all mattered now. The

race—the great, hopeless race he had planned for freedom had never even begun!

They had denied him even that satisfaction. Yes, he could attack, Tayne, and Tayne would kill him. But that would not be a fight. It would be simply the choice of suicide, at the hands of the man who would derive the most satisfaction from being its prime instrument. The man who already signed the death warrants for Mike and Terry . . .

And Dot. Dot, after some awful agony would see him again perhaps, but she would see with uncomprehending eyes, hear with unrecognizing ears. If she lived through what they did to her, she would no longer be Dot at all.

Dully, he could hear Tayne's words in a background that was a thousand miles away. "*Reconciled and steady as she blasts. This is QT to Control, C-Limit check—trajectory secure. Out.*"

And again, there was something far back in Doug's brain, struggling harder . . .

Then even as Tayne turned toward him from the dial consoles, it burst into the forefront of his mind like a flare in the darkness. *Twelve hundred Kemps at three hundred milliamperes, sir . . . Genemotor, type A-26-F modified . . . Sergeant! The neuro-tablets at*

*once . . . Commandments Four, Part 3, Subsection 12 as amended . . . all space craft shall be robot-controlled and shall fly predetermined trajectories, save (1) when bearing members of the Science Council and/or their certified representatives, to whom manual operation and navigation at will is singularly permissible, or (2) when insurmountable emergency shall occur . . .*

And suddenly, Doug's brain vaulted from the lethargy of hopelessness and it was again at his command, a sharp, poised weapon of battle. *For Tayne knew! Yet he would die before he would tell—unless, somehow . . .*

"Such confidence, Quadrate Tayne! Admirable! But you would look so much more fit for your role with your sword in your hand, not in your scabbard!"

Tayne reddened. "If it were not for my orders, Blair—"

"Why, such a lack of conditioning, Quadrate! Don't you know killing me is supposed to be so repulsive to you that you couldn't even stomach the thought of it? Tell me, don't I make you sick, Quadrate?"

TAYNE'S hand went to the hilt of his weapon. He half-drew it, slammed it back in its scabbard.

"Blair, we have twenty hours aboard this ship together. We can be at each other's throats like children. Or not, as you please."

Doug sat down on the edge of the acceleration hammock. Perhaps it would not be so difficult. Carefully, he entered the role further. He must have just the right kind of smile.

"Ah, but think of all the trouble I can get you in if I make you lose your temper and kill me! And you have got to admit, where I'm going, it doesn't make much difference—to me, I mean."

Tayne turned back to the instrument panel as though to signify that he had suddenly become a deaf man. And Doug kept talking, as though to signify a complete lack of interest in whether Tayne was a deaf man or not.

"As the matter stands, they took my sword away. So you'd never get anywhere with a self-defense alibi. Lord, how they'd make you sweat! By Saint Napoleon's mother I like the thought of that! And, after all, since this is going to be my last flight, I really think I'm entitled to a little amusement."

Silence.

"You know, Quadrate," Doug kept on relentlessly, "I don't imagine you expected even me to act

like this, did you? No, of course not. Not very much the officer and gentleman. But that makes us more or less even. You don't know what a gentleman is. You're so stupid you don't even know who the next President of the United States is going to be!—Oh, sorry. I keep forgetting—I don't think I ever told you that I'm not the real Senior Quadrate Blair, and that I'm not from your universe at all, did I, Tayne? Ever hear of the World Series? Oh, there I—"

Tayne turned his head.

"Easy does it! I imagine you must think I've gone mad. Don't blame you. I don't act at all like the Blair you know. Of course if I am mad, you'd better be careful. And if I am from another universe, you'd better be even more careful. As a matter of fact, at the moment, Quadrate, your life may not be worth very much."

Doug rubbed his fingernails on his tunic, inspected their new sheen. Then he looked up at Tayne.

Tayne stood, face mottled, an uneasy little thread of uncertainty deep under the surface of his eyes.

"Very well, just to make it easy for you, Mr. Tayne, we shall say I am mad, because that's easy to believe, and I can see you're quite sure of it already. Yet just the same I can outwit you, Quadrate.

That is, I think that in the twenty hours of our flight together I can reduce you to a gibbering idiot, far worse off than myself! Why, I may even have you mumbling that you're Saint Napoleon himself! Now wouldn't that be a picture!" Blair slapped his right hand to his tunic-front.

And Tayne drew his sword.

"If you killed me, Quadrate, you would have no proof of my madness for the others—and I'm sure that our standing enmity would be reasoned as the far more credible motive. Reasonable people, yours. Very. So much so that they're all above making a rather ridiculous harangue like this. Face the S-Council rather stoically, I should imagine. Quietly, as befits their dignity. *Right?*"

Tayne almost jumped clear of the deck.

"By jingo, you're nervous, man! Sweating, too. And twenty more hours. Let's see—what'll we talk about?"

Tayne was tense, immobile, undisguisedly confused.

"I bet you're thinking that if you could get me in a state of—shall we say, unconsciousness, your troubles would be over. But you'd have to get close to me to do that. And we both know that sword of yours is no threat. Besides, I'm a madman. Either mad, or from

another universe—ha!—and then I might be able to kill you with a glance! Of course, you can suppose this is all just an act, but even if I told you it was you wouldn't be exactly sure, would you? Would you, now?"

TAYNE sheathed the sword. And slowly, as though he had reached some desperate decision, he turned to the control panels. But not to the ones at which he'd stood before. He touched one of a row of white studs above which were the words S-C ONLY. And a rectangle of metal hardly more than a foot in length and half as much in width slid back beneath his fingertips, exposing a compact console of control keys.

*Or (2) when an insurmountable emergency should occur . . .*

Tayne was pressing buttons, and Doug knew that the trajectory had been broken, and that the ship was free of its autorobot and under Tayne's sole command.

The manual control console. Tayne had had enough! Were he an Earthman as Doug was an Earthman—but he was not! He was a creature of pattern, and there was only the pattern to follow. And an 'insurmountable emergency' had indeed arisen. Flight with a madman who spoke of other universes, and who, by

definition of orders, dare not be killed.

Doug, still seated, braced his feet on the hammock's bottom edge, and checked his spring even with his muscles tensed.

For Tayne turned suddenly. And the fear, the confusion were gone!

"Thank you, Quadrate Blair!" he said. "Madman, I am convinced—yet brilliant to the last! I admit, I may not have thought of our personal enmity as a motive for my actions—as a motive, I mean, that would justify them!"

Something turned to ice in Doug's stomach. It was going wrong, somehow.

Tayne drew the sword slowly. "I shall kill you now. You see, you hated me so much that I am afraid your hatred broke its bounds. And you not only attacked me but—but I'm afraid you also attempted to take over manual control of the ship in your madness. And for that of course —"

The sword was descending even as Doug launched his body from the hammock.

They went down then, and the sword clattered from Tayne's grasp. The blade-edge was speckled with red, and there was a searing pain across Doug's back. But his hands were on Tayne's throat, and they were closing.

And then they opened. The whistle of air into Tayne's lungs as he fought for breath and for consciousness told Doug he had only seconds before there was full life in the Quadrate's body again.

But the seconds were enough, for within them, he had the sword's hilt firmly in his own hand. And then he had its tip at the Quadrate's swollen, pulsing throat.

"You damn near threw me off schedule, Grand Imperial Wizard. Come on get up."

Doug felt little rivulets of blood trickle down his spine. The wound still stung, but it was not deep.

Slowly, Tayne rose, the sword-point beneath his chin.

"Don't make me nervous," Doug said. "Sudden moves get me all jittery, and sometimes when I'm jittery I kill stuffed shirts just to ease the tension. Back up. Now around — slow, Noble Grand Knight, or you'll fall down without your head." The sword point traced a thin line of red half-way around Tayne's neck as the man turned. "Now we're going to have some fun—only wish you were a tax-writer and I'd get a bigger kick out of this. Venus, James. And at the first peculiar maneuver—such as maybe cutting out the pseudograv or dumping us on the carpet without enough backblast and your nice uniform will get all

gooked up. Blood, you know." He dug the point deeper into Tayne's flesh until some of it was red, the rest white with pain.

And again, there was nothing to do but play the gamble out. How brave, Doug wondered, was a creature of pattern?

**V**ENUS filled the viewscreen, the white sea of the planet's sky stretching unruffled beneath them.

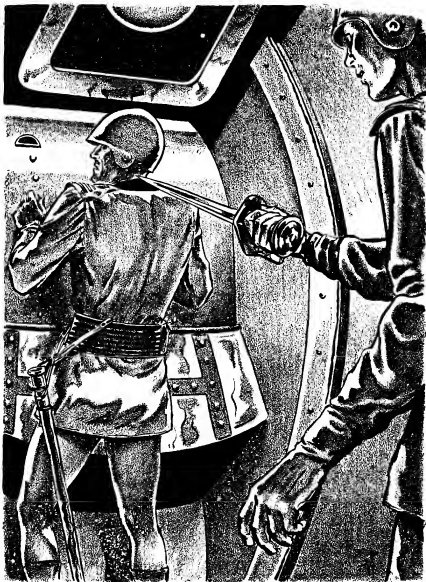
"Northern land mass, Tayne. Your Quadrant. Thirtieth Division, Second Regiment, First Battalion, Company 'A'."

Tayne still said nothing. Doug kept the steady pressure on the sword point.

The round, black buttons were arranged like an inverted T. Beneath them were three square, flush-set dials. One was easily recognizable as an artificial horizon-ecliptic indicator. The second, Doug thought, indicated both plus and minus acceleration. And the third, simple velocity and altitude.

Tayne's fingers had not punched the buttons, but had played them almost as though they were the keys of a musical instrument. The horizontal row was for change of direction to either left or right. The vertical, change in axial thrust, for either upward accelerations or forward, depending upon





flight attitude. A slow turn executed by pressing the buttons of desired intensity of power in both horizontal and vertical columns simultaneously, with turn sharpness simply a matter of coordinated button selection.

The top button was for full thrust—full speed in level flight, blast-off from take-off position, or full deceleration in landing attitude. Those below it were for power in progressively lesser amounts. A twist of a fingertip would lock any of the buttons at any degree of power output desired. With practiced co-ordination, simple enough. Yet—what about climb or dip from the horizontal? Or inversion for landing? That was something for which he must wait.

The cut across his back throbbed now, and he dared not brush his hands across his eyes to smear the sweat from them.

And suddenly, Tayne's voice grated, "You had better drop the sword, Blair." There was the tightness of pain in his words, but they were clear. "I refuse to invert the ship. If we are to land, it must be inverted in sixty seconds. If you kill me, you kill yourself, for you do not know how to operate the panel beyond what you have seen—and you have not seen the operation for inversion. If you give me the sword, you will

land alive."

"You're out of your head, Mr. Tayne! I'm Senior Quadrate Blair, remember? I know how to operate the panel as well or better than you do. Get going!" He dug the tip deeper, and fresh blood started.

But, Tayne's fingers remained immobile.

"Mad or sane, Senior Quadrate Blair or—or something else, if you knew how to use the panel, you would not have taken the risk of forcing me to do it! I would already be dead—"

There was a sudden, empty space in Doug's stomach.

"Thirty seconds, Blair."

The white mass of the sky was scant miles below them. He would need all of the thirty seconds, and there was no time to think—only time to realize that if he were to live, he must kill Tayne. It was like that time so long ago on the beaches of Normandy . . .

With all his strength he plunged the sword through Tayne's neck. And his own hands were at the control panel before Tayne's gurgling corpse had slumped to the deck. The life-blood seeped from it far more slowly than the seconds slipped beneath Doug's taut fingers.

Not the buttons, not the dials, for he had seen them. But part of

the panel itself—it had to be!

The panel *itself*!

He pressed one side, the other. Nothing. Ten seconds perhaps...

The bottom or the top next. But which? If it moved on a lateral axis—that would be it, for elevation or depression from the horizontal! But to accomplish what would amount to a half-loop...

He pressed the top of the panel. And it gave beneath his touch. In the viewscreen, the white mass which rushed to envelop him seemed to shift—

Further down—that was it, all the way around!

Slowly, against an unseen source of pressure, he revolved the panel a half-revolution about its lateral axis. Already he could see its reverse side—on it in the same pattern there was an identical set of control buttons, dials.

In the viewscreen there was a half-second's glimpse of the blackness of Space before the inverted ship tumbled tail-first into the white ocean of the Venus sky.

And again there was the awful sensation of falling through infinity. Desperately, he pushed the top button.

## CHAPTER XVII

HE locked the top button at full depression and struggled to

keep his legs straight beneath him, braced as they were now against a bulkhead which but a few minutes before had been, not a floor, but a wall. The ship's gyro system was no longer functioning as a pseudograv unit, but rather as a vertical stabilizer, and the second dial said four gravities.

The acceleration needle dropped with agonizing slowness. Four gravities, three point seven. The altimeter said one hundred thousand feet, then ninety thousand, eighty, seventy-five.

Three point five gravities. Three point three. Even three at last.

Fifty thousand feet, forty-five, forty-two, forty thousand.

Two point six gravities.

Thirty-five thousand.

Two. One point nine. Point eight, seven, six, five.

Twenty-three thousand.

One gravity.

And the ship was hovering balanced by her gyros, at twenty-one thousand feet above boundless reaches of Venusian sea.

Gingerly, Doug pressed the top of the panel, released the top button.

There was a sickening drop as from somewhere deep inside the ship new sets of engines rumbled automatically to life as her nose came down, her belly-jets belching, breaking the drop on their cushion

of power. And again the craft hovered, but now horizontally.

Tayne's corpse tumbled grotesquely off the bulkhead to the deck, made Doug miss his footing, and he fell.

But nothing happened. The panel, without pressure, had returned automatically to zero setting, and the belly-jets held steady.

Swiftly then, cursing himself for his awkwardness, Doug tore at Tayne's cloak, the blood-soaked tunic beneath it. Somewhere he must have it—logically, he must have it.

Something crackled. Doug smeared stinging sweat from his eyes as he bent closer, found the neatly-hidden pocket, thrust a hand inside.

It was hard to keep the thin, bound packet of wide plastisheets steady. Clumsily, he flicked to blank pages of Tayne's unused record tablet. In those he had examined at his office the campaign maps had been in the back.

And he found them there. *Estimated deployment, Phase One, First Hour.*

No good . . . two, perhaps three hours had elapsed. Gamble on Phase Three.

Division Thirty, Second Regiment, First Battalion, 'A' Company. There.

He stood up, locked a deep

breath inside him, and placed his fingers on the inverted T of control buttons for a second time.

North was the top of the view-screen. What shown in it then must slide from the top down.

His fingertip caressed the bottom-most button. And there was a gentle surge of acceleration, and the screen picture was moving diagonally. First button on the right . . .

THE picture swung slowly around. And then it was moving from top to bottom of the screen. He pushed the bottom button all the way in, and the velocity needles swung slowly up. A touch on the button above it, and the needle quivered five hundred ten.

And then on the horizon there was suddenly a light blue blur, and he braced himself against the shock of forward acceleration as he pushed the button all the way in. Its limit was close to two thousand miles per hour, and he locked it there.

Moments later he released it, eased pressure on it as the blue blur shaped itself into the coastline of the northern land mass. Gradually, he depressed the panel a full ninety degrees.

And the hurtling craft swung again on her blazing tail. Doug

let the panel return to zero and held the bottom button in. The belly-jets had automatically cut out, and again he hovered, sinking slightly, this time not above the dark blue waste of the Venusian sea, but above the place where fantastic young armies with ten-year-old soldiers were writhing, dying.

The altimeter needle showed five thousand feet, and already he was able to discern the battle-lines of the two quadrants, no longer in close marching formation, but now spread wide to cover an irregular area of more than one hundred square miles. The lines surged first forward then back, as though joined in some Gargantuan tug-of-war—shifted, changed, like a great wounded serpent in its death-throes.

The lines were little more than a hundred yards in depth because deployment for the games provided for no rear echelons—there were only the battle echelons, with their ends defended mightily against encirclement, attack from the rear.

Eventually, Doug knew, the flank defenses of both lines would give way, and the centers of each would rupture, and then, until the hovering tab and evac planes gave the signal that the Phase Three limit had been reached, the battle would wage in a great undulating mass, without formation, without

plan, without reason. He had to reach Mike and Terry before then, for once the lines disintegrated into Final Phase — deployment at will—they'd be lost to him for good.

And Phase Three lasted at best for three hours. Final Phase, when it begun, would last as many days.

Somehow, he had to jockey the hovering ship over the area where the map-estimate indicated that Mike and Terry would be fighting. And when he landed, he must somehow halt the carnage momentarily—just long enough for them to see him, to run . . .

Doug tilted the great ship at an angle of about seventy degrees, compensated it on the main drive and the single bank of bow belly-jets that automatically checked in as the ship left vertical balance. And the terrain below him moved slowly, canted oddly between horizon and sky.

Slowly, toward the area designated on the map—slowly, sinking slightly, so that he could see their faces now, watch as their maces shattered the glittering helmets into junk, smashed into living flesh, as their broadswords glistened red and swung, struck . . .

**M**OMENTARILY hypnotized by the horror that screamed below him and by the sickening realization that what he saw was

real even though his reason rebelled through force of habit from admission that such reality could exist, Doug watched the tilted battlefield as it stretched but hundreds of feet below him now, watched as a smoothly-oiled, carefully calculated device preserved the peace of a planet.

*A small, sweating body was hewn in two.*

*A helmeted head fell; an arm dropped grotesquely beside it.*

*A boy's boot was bathed in blood as he kicked viciously at his opponent's chest to withdraw his sword from it.*

*A brief, two-handed struggle with sword and mace—a sword stroke was parried, the swinging mace was not, and a splintered rib with shreds of flesh still sticking to it clung to the mace-pikes as an adversary fell, the left side of his body gone.*

And the dead, still-quivering masses of flesh and bone were trampled as they fell, to be swiftly covered by other still-dying bodies which collapsed, writhing, atop them, to be trampled in their turn . . .

Doug shuddered uncontrollably. Kids, dying on a battlefield like this!

A pair of helmeted heads suddenly disappeared in a twin red gush from two pairs of sweating

shoulders, and a group of twenty boys converged on the spot, fought for almost a minute, and then the heads were covered, and one boy at length dragged himself away, arms limp, helpless. He died while an evac ship was landing. The swinging mace that broke his back had not been necessary. He who wielded it fell also an instant later, his spine severed in a long, diagonal gash. And Doug thought how odd it was that a sword-cleft could look so like the tearing wound which a flying chunk of shrapnel would gouge.

He was so low now that he had long since lost sight of the lines' ends, had no way of knowing when encirclement at last would begin, when the center of each line would give way, when Final Phase would begin. But it seemed that the fighting had become less orderly, more closely-grouped, more frenzied. Within minutes the Third Phase map would be useless, and in Final Phase, there would be no knowing. No knowing until long after the end.

The altimeter needle said two hundred feet, when, if he had read the map with any degree of accuracy, he was over the area assigned to Tayne's Thirtieth Division. He had the ship straightened and descending when the blue light inset in the communications panel

began to blink. He would let it blink. Yet if he answered, at least he would know their intentions . . .

Bloody young warriors sought desperately to give the great craft room as he descended. Some were incinerated in its back-blast, and Doug murmured a prayer that they had been among the already-dying. He would not let himself think that of all he had seen die, any two could have been Terry and Mike. He refused to let himself think that of the dozen turned to cinders by his descending jets, any two could have been Terry and Mike . . .

THE blue-red ground came slowly up to meet him. The blue light kept blinking. He increased pressure on the bottom button—hovered, sank, hovered again, sank.

And when the ground was obliterated with the searing flame of his drive tubes, there was a gentle jar, and Doug let the button snap from beneath his finger. He was down, and there was not even time to feel relief.

He tripped over Tayne's body, fell heavily against the communications panel. His fingers fumbled for a switch near the inset microphone. The words blurred . . .  
*FIELD ADDRESS. RADIO-SEND. RADIO-REC. FLEET*

*INTERCOM.*

He twisted the knob to *RADIO-REC.* and the blue light stopped blinking.

" . . . D to QT, D to QT, over . . . "

He turned the dial to *RADIO-SEND.*

"This is QT," he said. He switched back, waited.

"Larsen, this is Gundar! What in Napoleon's name are you doing? What did you do with Blair?"

Doug tore a plastisheet leaf from Tayne's note tablet, thrust it over the mike-face.

"I had to kill him."

"Kill him? Larsen you fool . . . You know what they'll say—"

"He tried to get at the manual controls . . . succeeded in wrecking the autorobot, so I had to use them. And I had to kill him when he tried to take over by force. Give you a—"

"Larsen, something wrong with your communications? You're coming in badly—didn't read your last. Say again please."

"He wrecked the robot control," Doug repeated. His lips were dry across his teeth and it was hard to keep his voice even. "I had to break out the manual. He tried to take them over, too, so I had to kill him. He was like a maniac—you know how he hated me. Must have figured out the

whole plan somehow, and went berserk. I'll file a complete report when this is finished. Over." He waited, sweat rolling in icy rivulets the length of his arms. The wound on his back stung, and his muscles were trembling with fatigue.

"What do you mean, when this is finished? Got to be immediate, man! There'll be hell to pay as it is. I was afraid something would go wrong—he was a smarter man than you thought, and I told you as much. Take care of whatever you're checking on down there immediately and then get back to headquarters and draw up a form 312-L-5. File for my office and the PG's. You should've done that at once. Out."

"Yes, sir, right away. Out."

There was a silent prayer on Doug's lips as he turned the knob to *FIELD ADDRESS*. It was worth a try . . .

There was a humming sound. However it functioned, it was ready.

"This is Senior Quadrate Blair. All units within range of this command will cease battle immediately . . ."

He twisted a control under the viewscreen, kept twisting until its scope had undergone a ninety degree shift. And then he saw them, waves of them, slowing, stopping,

turning to face the ship. Unbelievably, the sound of his voice had somehow been carried for a radius of at least a mile, and thousands of them, their blood mingled with their muddied sweat, were suddenly still, listening. Some fell, untouched, as a last wound belatedly took its toll. But all that could remained standing. There could be no sitting rest, for none knew when the command to resume battle would come, and when it did, it would be death to be sitting.

Within a half minute, a great circle of them was still, battle continuing only at its periphery where his command was either being defended or had gone unheard.

"Attention, troops of Division Thirty, Second Regiment, First Battalion, A Company. If—" and he dared not hesitate, must say it quickly, and then wait, "—Ronald Blair and Kurt Blair are able, they will report to this ship on the double! Terry, Mike—" and there was a sudden catch in his voice that he could not help. Then, "*Come running.*"

And he watched the viewscreen, turned the knob slowly to revolve its range, a complete 360 degrees.

Nothing, nothing as he turned slowly.

**I**N moments Gundar Tayne would contact him again, question



him, and he would have no convincing answer. And then it would be too late. He would have the choice of punching the top button and catapulting himself to safety, not knowing even if Mike and Terry still lived somewhere down there, or staying to carry out a gamble that should have been lost a dozen times already.

Suddenly, he saw it. The huge ship of the Director, in a long, circling glide. And the boys were moving again, raising their swords, circling their maces. He had been countermanded—

The blue light was blinking.

Another ten degrees of turn—

There was a terrible clattering at the stern of the ship as though it was being rent apart plate by plate. The screen would not depress that far. He revolved it back. Tayne's ship had landed a scant hundred yards away and a guard had already been flung around it. And men were approaching on the run, strange devices in their hands. Then they stopped, were putting the devices in position on the ground.

The clanging grew louder now.

It would be one of them. One of them with a warning, and if he did not open up, surrender . . . But the blue light still blinked.

He could have missed them. As he swung the screen, they could

have been running in an area yet untouched—the last ten degrees . . .

The clanging was lessening.

He hauled down the knife-switch marked "STERN PORT."

The clanging ceased.

And then, muffled almost to inaudibility, a wild, far-off yell. "*Shut it, Dad, for the luvva mike, SHUT it!*"

And he jammed the switch home.

There was an awful racket then. An awful, wonderful racket. Mike, Terry, clambering hell-bent up the spiraling cat-walks! Mike, Terry, safe aboard . . .

A movement in the viewplate still-ed the cry that had formed in his throat. The strange devices—there was a bluish-white flash, and the viewscreen was suddenly white with a ball of coruscating brilliance. Short . . .

Had to blast off—but the kids, not braced on the cat-walks . . . Still clambering, maybe only half-way up . . .

Another streak, but no flash. Over. They were bracketing.

The next one, whatever it was, the next one would be a bulls-eye.

With all his voice he bellowed "*HANG ON!*" even as Mike and Terry burst, breathless, into the control room.

His finger hesitated only a moment. And then he jammed the bottom button in and his knees

bent, but they held.

And in the corner of his eye he saw the blue-white flash erupt dead-center below.

He eased the button pressure and hovered, out of range.

In a moment Gundar Tayne's craft would be in the air. Then . . .

"Kids—kids, you O.K.?" He locked the ship in its hover and then he was beside them, scanning their half-naked, bruised bodies in quick glances, then holding them to him with all the strength of both arms.

"Dad?"

"Yes. Me, your old man . . ."

"We been dodgin' and watchin' for hours, Dad. Let's get out of here!"

He held them to him a second longer, then turned to the communications panel, Mike at his left, Terry at his right. ". . . They almost caught us at the door down there . . . Dad I—I think I killed one . . ."

"We did as you said, Dad. We watched as much as we could, but most of the time we had to stay on the ground, playing dead . . ."

The communications dial was still at *FIELD ADDRESS*.

He looked at it, then looked at the viewscreen. Thousands of them, stilled for so short a moment, now surging, tearing at each other's vitals again. There was a

terrible hurt somewhere deep inside him, and he wanted to voice it, to get it out, to tell them somehow.

But they would not understand him if he were to speak for a minute or for an hour. These whom he watched had been lost from the day of their birth.

But, thank Heaven, not the two at his side.

"Get in those hammocks, kids," he said.

They did, and he braced himself against the bulkhead. He was twisting the top button even as he punched it home, and it caught.

The deck rushed up with smashing force.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE white, sterile room seemed to have closed in upon itself since she had been first brought to it so many hours before, and the heavy desk was now just a great mass of steel, its curved lines no longer distinct, but trailing off somewhere in an incomprehensible geometry of their own. There was movement behind the desk, white, blurry movement that blended with the walls, but the flesh-colored mask that hovered above it did not seem to move at all. Dot's eyes could no longer focus for the fatigue of the tests had sucked the

well of her physical energy dry, but she knew the face.

He was Mannix, director of the S-Council, they had told her.

The tests had torn her soul from her, turned it inside out, stripped it naked, examined it beneath their microscopes of unending questions asked in a thousand different ways with a thousand different inflections, connotations . . . The sterile white rooms, the lights, the darkness . . .

To hear what she and they had known from the beginning, and what the blurred, unmoving face was telling her now.

" . . . tests have been evaluated according to Section 679, Sub-section B of Commandment Seventeen, Part E, as amended, and you have been found to be unquestionably sane. It is my duty therefore to interpret the law with a finding of guilty of acts of heresy, as charged in each of the counts cited, committed with the premeditated deliberation of a sound, and therefore fully responsible mind."

Dot no longer felt fear, only a terrible tiredness. It did not matter what Mannix said. Nor of course, could it matter what she might say. There was the truth, of course, but it would be doubly incriminating, and would spell disaster for Doug.

*She would never see Doug again.*

" . . . entitled, by rank, to denial . . . "

*Or know him if she did.*

" . . . may speak now as privileged, before you are sentenced . . . "

*Never see her Earth, her Terry or her Mike again!*

" . . . and in the absence of remonstrance as privileged . . . "

*Or know that the sun and the stars above the alien planet upon which she would walk were not those under which she had been born . . .*

" . . . hereby sentence you, Madame Lisa Blair, to loss of privilege to breed offspring through sterilization, and to the complete loss of all ego and all memory therewith connected through psychomutation, which treatment shall immediately follow the first. In the name of the Prelatine, the Prelate General, and the party hosts, I do so pronounce sentence."

A panel had opened noiselessly behind her.

The blurred face nodded imperceptibly, and arms suddenly were lifting her to her feet, leading her from the white, sterile room . . .

THERE was an empty roaring in his ears as he struggled for consciousness, and he could only half-feel the tugging at his body, half-hear the frightened sound of

Terry's voice.

Dad—dad, you've got to get up, dad!"

Painfully, he made his shaking muscles take over the burden of his weight, forced himself to his feet.

The viewscreen was black save for the receding white disk that was Venus. The acceleration needle quivered at just under two gravities.

"—Dad, everything feels funny. So heavy. For a long time we couldn't even move out of those bed-things."

His head hurt and there was drying blood on the side of his face. His body felt as though it had been flailed by a thousand of the maces, and his back wound was a long, throbbing ache, and it was sticky-wet again.

He tried to force a grin to his face, and even that drew tiny shards of pain.

"Wish I could've gotten to one of those bed-things, Mike! Believe me I never want to hear the expression 'hit the deck' again."

"Well you sure hit it. Anything feel busted?"

"Everything sure does! But I'll be O.K. in a minute." He sat heavily on the edge of a hammock, fought against the tugging urge to sink back into unconsciousness. But when the acceleration needle

said one gravity and the gyros took over, he had to get back on his feet.

"Dad! Where the heck are we going?"

"And when you get us there, will you tell us what the contraption did to get us in this place, and make us all—even you—look all different? We thought it was one of those scary dreams until you got us out in front of everybody . . . and I still ain't so sure . . ."

Doug still hurt, but the dizziness was going, and there was Terry's question to answer. It was a good question.

"Earth, that's where we're going! Ever hear of it?"

"This is a *real* space-ship, Dad?"

Doug smiled down at him. "It's pretty real," he said.

They watched him in silence as he began his search.

He wasted twenty minutes at it before he was forced to the conclusion that there were no astronomical charts, no star maps. The Science Council would have its own, and the robot didn't need any . . .

He was glad the boys were with him. Glad, because without them, the cold panic that welled inside might have taken hold. Glad, because with them, he could muster the will it took to keep from telling himself how terribly big and

empty infinity was.

Maybe you should've stuck with the MIT degree after all, Carl Grayson had said. And, he had stuck himself with it! But, if the things he had learned to get it had gotten him into this, then they would damn well have to get him out!

Doug ripped the blank plastisheets from Tayne's unused notebook, tossed them to the flat surface of the console. There was an ink-stylus in another pocket of the dead man's tunic.

He pointed to a bulkhead chronometer. "Tell me when an hour's up, boys," he said.

He must have his answers within the hour, for in computing them he would need a constant to represent known navigation error, and the hour would represent it, once he determined its value. And if he should exceed that time, its value would be changed—and the constant, the calculations, worthless.

With the viewscreen, he began his search of space for the bright, blue-white planet that would be Earth. When he found it, he would use twenty minutes of the hour to establish the plane of its ecliptic. Then, if he could remember what the books had said, remember its orbital speed, its orbital arc for the month of August and its resultant distance from the

sun. And then of course the same mathematical equivalents for Venus, and subsequent establishment of the necessary relationships. And then interjected in it must be his own speed and relative direction for the space of one hour.

And when he had his dead-reckoning solution, it would still be like shooting ducks—with Earth the biggest duck that a man ever had to bag. And with a sling-shot—his stylus—not the finely-machined shotgun that would be the slide-rule and calculator which he didn't have.

He kept turning the screen. In six precious minutes he found it, like a bright new jewel pinned to the white silk scarf of the Milky Way.

Earth.

He reached for the ink-stylus, the blank plastisheets . . .

**T**HERE was a searing, bright light above her and it sent stabbing tentacles of pain through her head, and they lashed at her flapping brain.

They had lain her prone on a cold, flat surface, and their faces circled her, blurred as Mannix' had been, and infinitely far above her.

There was the murmur of voices, and the bright light was divided and divided again into myriads of

white, stabbing lances as it was broken into glittering bits upon the edges of the slender instruments they held.

Let them, let them . . .

*No, scream—scream or something, you idiot!*

In a second there would be the hypodermic or the anaesthesia and she would not be able to scream—

“You’re so—so stupid . . .” she heard her voice saying, a dimly audible echo off the edges of infinity itself. “Sterilize me. Keep me from breeding. What I want, you fools! They all do, they all do, you know. And you, yourselves, give the answer to it. To our question, how much longer, how many, many more . . .”

She could not be sure if she spoke waking or dreaming, in the delirium of exhaustion or in the unintelligibility of anaesthesia. But she was thinking the words, and she could still feel the motion of her tongue, its fuzzy touch against her teeth.

The glittering instruments were immobile.

“If heresy brings us this—this relief from a fear of forever being only a machine of flesh and blood to produce—to produce as any machine with no value whatever other than to produce until it falls into wreckage—then, then heresy will some day flourish, and you’ll

all be wrinkled and old, and there will be no young voices.”

She let the words bubble from her, not caring, yet somehow caring, somehow fighting with all her being. But it was not a clever ruse, for there was still not strength enough to consciously pit her wits against them. It was something else, this strange fight, something else that stemmed from deep within her.

And now the murmur of voices above her had changed tenor, oddly interrupted by jagged bits of silence.

Done something. What she had said had done something, and they were hearing her. Hearing her, so she must speak louder, must open her eyes wide and let the bright light send the stabbing flashes of pain deep into her brain, whip it stingingly into consciousness.

It hurt, it hurt . . .

Colored circles, drifting, but it was from the light—and she was thinking now, and in a moment she would be seeing their faces more clearly. Had to talk again . . .

**D**OT lurched up on her elbows, felt the curious relaxation of a smile on her lips. “Go ahead! The rest of the women know what you’re going to do to me! And pretty soon they’ll let you do it to them! If we’re no good as an un-

derground to stop you, we'll let you use us to stop yourselves—think that one over before next election!"

From somewhere very near her a voice said "Madame Blair, please. You are interfering with the operation!"

But now the words were coming more easily. Her hands and feet were cold and wet, and her muscles shook, but now she was fighting with the last of the energy in her, she was fighting because she had found the chink in their armor, and she could widen it, could break through!

"Oh, very well—I wouldn't do that! Because I've been looking forward to this for so very long. Just to think, I'll be comfortably dried up, and—it'll be legal! No more fear!"

"You must be silent, Madame Blair."

"Is there some new amendment to the precious Commandments that says I must be silent? The last one I heard was just before I was brought here—Yes, have you heard the latest, gentlemen? An amendment prohibiting the execution of a sentence on an official's wife, until that official is present as a legal witness? But no, I can see you haven't, and hope you get into all kinds of trouble! Chapter—Chapter 580, gentlemen—Book 631,

Section 451, Paragraph A, Subparagraph 34, Sentence."

And abruptly she let the bitter spurt of words taper into silence, and her eyes were wide. Only one of them was at her side—the rest were suddenly grouped around the one in charge, who was nervously fingering a telecall dial.

Like children! Doug said they were creatures of pattern, and something had suddenly smashed the pattern to smithereens, and they dared do nothing until they had a firm hold on the torn-up ends again. She had got them scared stiff!

*This is it, girl! Move!*

The last of her strength. A swift, sidewise kick, and she buried the heel of one bare foot into the groin of the man who had stayed to guard her. She had braced her other leg on the edge of the low operating table, and thus anchored, the kick carried all the merciless, impact that was needed. She did not wait to see the quick look of agony that mottled his face and she was off the table and running before he had sunk silently to his knees. The surgical robe was short and did not hamper her legs, and for the first time since she was a little girl, she ran for the sake of pure, uninhibited speed. She had reached the door marked EXIT ONLY before the rest of them realized what she had

done, and then they were after her, their howling voices a mixture of disbelief and dismayed anger.

It was a long, wide corridor. The enraged shouts of alarm behind her had already turned it into a thunderously echoing cacophony of pure and terrible noises, and she knew that within moments, around some turn ahead of her there would be more of them, and she would be trapped, and it would be all over.

She would have let the sudden pain in her side double her when, less than a hundred feet ahead of her, more of them did appear; her flagging strength would have let her fall at their feet had she not seen it at the last moment, hardly twenty feet from her—the thing for which she'd been so desperately looking, had not been able to see through the stinging mist that still made things blur uncertainly . . . Another door. Another door marked SERVICE EXIT at the top.

She ran through it, breath sucking painfully into her lungs, the surgical gown already wet and clinging to her with ice-cold sweat. A long steel ramp, forty feet above the ground, curving in a gentle half-spiral to the broad street below.

She fled the curving length of it, swiftly past other service exits,

her flight becoming more of a fall each split-second than a run, for her legs would not keep up. And then her momentum pitched her headlong into the street and she struggled desperately for balance.

She heard them behind her, feet thundering on the ramp, thundering in her ears.

A silver vehicle sped by, missed her, its undertow plucking at the sodden fabric of her garment. Another, and then suddenly the thundering grew louder and there was no more strength left.

The speeding golden-hued vehicle bore down on her, and Dot screamed, fell headlong in its path.

DOUG'S error was wide, but mercifully, he had led his target by too great a distance rather than by too little, and the ecliptic had been right. It would not be a chase, but a meeting. He brought Ship QT into a sharp, angling turn when he was sure, and there was silent thanksgiving at his lips as the moon of Earth rolled slowly far below him. And Earth itself became a pale blue bull's eye, growing perceptibly larger with each minute in the viewscreen.

He did not unlock the top button. He could be already many, many hours too late, but there was no knowing.



Like a great torpedo, the ship hurtled toward its target as though to blast it from Space. In eight minutes it would be midway between Earth and its moon, and in nine, Doug would invert, cutting the difference between crash and controlled landing perilously thin.

"Terry, get the dead man's sword and belt. Mike, help me find some tools—anything that even looks like a wrench."

When two of the nine minutes were gone, Doug had found a tool that would serve. When a portion of the third was gone he had a section of the communications panel naked. When seven of them were gone he had its high-kempage pack loose on its bearers, and when there were but seconds left in the ninth, he had it free, and lashed with torn strips of his cloak to one of the hammocks.

"Hold on, now," he said then. His voice was raw and it hurt to talk. There was a dryness in his mouth that made his words fuzzy and indistinct, and his tongue felt swollen enough to choke him. "I want both of you on that hammock—get that thing between you, strap yourselves down, and then hold onto it for all your life. When we land, get the straps off quickly, and—" he clenched his teeth, had to push the words through them, "—and have your swords ready.

I'll take care of the rest; you just follow me. Understand, boys?"

They nodded silently, strapping themselves securely to the hammock.

Three seconds . . . two, one. Release the top button. Press the panel full around, all the way . . . there go the bow belly-jets—stern jets topside . . . Top button, all the way in, twist it—

The Moon swam into the view-screen, was shrinking fast, too fast. No, slowing a little . . .

He swung the screen to full stern, and Earth was rushing up, not quite yet filling it.

Speed in thousands per second . . . sixteen . . . fifteen point five—fifteen. The needle fell so slowly. Gravs were coming up, one point five—two full. Over two now, and speed falling a little faster.

Earth filled the screen.

And then he took his eyes from the dials, for he knew that whatever they read, he was at the full mercy of the ship itself. The top button was all the way in, and locked. She was giving all she had.

When the grav indicator quivered at four, Doug slumped to the deck, unable to stand. He rolled to his back, winced, and tried to keep his eyes on the grav needle.

THEY blurred, stung in oceans of hot tears. The shrill siren-

scream of atmosphere pierced the thick, heavily insulated hull and Doug knew what was coming—heat, unbearable heat.

His short gasps seared his mouth, and his heart was like a gigantic pile driver inside him, struggling to burst its way through his chest.

And then as though it had all been but part of a timed experiment in some weird laboratory, the sensation of being crushed to death began to abate. He could see the grav needle again, and it had already fallen back to two. Speed was now in unit miles per hour, and the figures were dropping from nine hundred.

Doug forced himself to his feet.

"Dad . . . Dad, are we O.K.? Dad?"

"Maybe," he said.

When the grav needle was steady at One, Doug reduced thrust to hold them hovering at a little more than two hundred thousand feet over the Atlantic, with the coastline of what to him was France almost directly below.

A sickening, quick drop and the horizon-ecliptic indicator showed parallel flight, and Doug could feel the thrust of the belly engines beneath his feet. Then he pressed the bottom button, then the middle, and the Atlantic was rushing beneath them. Carefully, he de-

pressed the next one up. All the way in, he locked it. The velocity figure in unit miles per hour was fifteen thousand.

Eleven minutes later he cut the power again, slowed, brought the ship once more on its stern, and began his descent over Washington.

Within moments they would spot him, would be ready.

It would have to be fast, miles from the central space-port—a suburb, near a highway.

He let her fall fast. Ten thousand. Eight. Four.

He tilted, angled a little north and west, then dropped again.

At five hundred feet he trebled the power, and it was as though a great 'chute had snapped open above them.

Three hundred feet—the highway perhaps a quarter of a mile distant.

No one down there, but they could be hiding, waiting.

Fifty feet. Had to time it just so, now . . .

The last ten feet they fell.

## CHAPTER XIX

HE estimated that there would be five minutes at the most before the area was flooded with S-men. The rest of the gamble hinged entirely on what they succeeded in doing, or failed to do,

within the space of a few hundred heart-beats.

They made the roadside in little more than a minute after leaving the ship. Terry and Mike lay prone in the wide drainage gutter, their swords drawn, their bodies camouflaged by a few handfuls of hastily hacked scrub brush.

Doug stood at the side of the superhighway, the power pack at his feet, his shredded cloak in his hands to wave.

The traffic seemed light for so late in the afternoon. The sun was hot, and he was breathing heavily from the stumbling, desperate run across the small, rutted field. The ship towered above what few trees there were, and it marked them for a target.

A streamlined shape was racing toward him. It seemed to take all the strength he had left to wave the cape, and he wondered if he were waving it at searching S-men . . .

The vehicle sped by, whipping the cape in its undertow. It was going nearly two hundred miles an hour, and there was no driver inside it. A robot carrier.

Thirty seconds went by before the next one came. It was going slower, and it too was driverless.

Doug glanced at the sky. To the west, high, tiny dots—

It was a full minute before the

next one came. With both hands, cloak dropped because it was too heavy, Doug waved, and the vehicle was slowing.

"Ready, boys . . ." There was a slight rustle behind him as they came to their knees.

The driver stopped his car almost abreast of him, and opened the passenger door.

"What's the trouble? You crack up? While we're riding you can use the autophone—"

Doug moved into the vehicle slowly, then lashed out at the man's head with the smooth, heavy rock that was in his left hand. In his exhaustion he struck only a glancing blow, and there was barely time for a second, but the second connected, and the driver slumped, jammed behind his semi-circular steering wheel.

"Mike, Terry—"

In a moment the helicopter would have him spotted, or an S-Council patrol car would be braking beside him.

They hauled the driver out, left him at the road side. He was not dead, and Doug was curiously thankful for that. He had killed one man already . . .

He wasted a second for another glance at the sky. Closer now, and it was obvious that they had spotted the ship. He had to get the vehicle in motion somehow. A

robot sped by, its air wake rocking them slightly. He had the pack on the seat beside him, and Terry was slamming the door.

No clutch or brake pedal. Only one pedal, and it could only be an accelerator. But pivoted in the middle. There was no sound to the engine, no way to tell if it were running because the only dash instrument was a speed indicator.

He pressed the pedal forward. And they did not move. Backward, then . . .

It moved. In five seconds the speed needle was climbing past eighty, going smoothly upward.

He wondered if they had been seen.

In a dash mirror he saw Terry and Mike turning their heads up, looking through the curved transparent metal top.

"Must be a hunnerd of 'em—they're starting to land I think!"

"All of them?"

"I guess so—wait! Yeah, he's gonna land, too I guess. I can't see 'em anymore. Gosh, we're sure moving."

"Creepers, a hundred and *eighty*! Hey Dad, where are we going, anyway?"

"To the headquarters hospital building. I think—I think that's where your mother is."

"Is she hurt?"

"I don't know, Mike, I don't

know."

He pressed his heel to the floorboard. He was glad for Tayne's sword at his side. Even for the ones the boys carried.

THE sign said City of Washington, District of Columbia, Population 531,423. Speed Limit 55 MPH.

Doug raised his heel, the car slowed. He frowned. No roadblocks, no pursuit! There had been plenty of time since the helicopters had landed—five, six minutes perhaps. They knew where he was going, and were going to let him walk right into it, some neatly conceived trap at the hospital. So they'd be sure to have him alive . . . alive, to be used as an example!

Savagely, he heeled the pedal down. Let them be waiting—they were fools if they hadn't figured on the swords! Or—or he was a fool, for counting on them.

The car's tires wailed as he rounded the long, curving turn that brought him onto St. Jefferson Way, past the Payne Monument, and within two blocks of the headquarters building hospital wing.

The traffic was thickening, planned of course to make things look as natural as possible—not to arouse his suspicion at the last

moment . . .

"Get those swords ready, kids . . ."

He heard them scrape from their scabbards.

And without warning the form of a woman darted into his path. He swerved, jammed the pedal forward, and the car rocked sickently.

And he had seen her face in that one awful second—it was Dot who had fallen in the street behind him!

The boys were at his heels as he leapt from the car. There were white-clad men rushing toward them, and he had Dot's form in his arms as the first of them closed in.

There was the quick blink of sunlight on steel as Mike and Terry swung their weapons.

And as though stunned, the men in white stopped short, suddenly silent, awkwardly-poised statues.

Doug knew the spell would last for seconds at best. The half-naked boys stood grimly, feet wide apart, sword-hilts grasped in both hands.

Doug, with Dot's limp body in his arms, broke for the car.

"Come on!"

And Terry and Mike were at his heels. The men in white broke their frozen ranks then and swarmed over the small area of street that the two broadswords had commanded for the telling few seconds.

Doug bolted the vehicle into motion. And then they were free.

"What dopes," Mike was saying. "Were they scared! I bet they didn't figure we'd be ready to fight 'em! But who did we—?"

"Boys, see what you can do for your mother. It is your mother, she just looks different, like we do . . ."

"Mother—"

"Hurry up. She's just fainted, that's all. We didn't hit her."

**D**OT was conscious when they arrived at the house, and she was managing to speak.

"Are they—"

"The boys, yes Dot. Our boys. Now look, we've got to run for it. I'll carry you, and you hang on to the pack . . . Mike, Terry—"

"Ready, Dad. Will there be many?"

"I don't know. Maybe none, but if there aren't, it'll only be for a very few minutes. Let's go!"

They ran, and the boys burst through the front door with their swords lunging at emptiness.

"The cellar!"

He heard them clamber down the steel stairs.

"It's O.K. Dad—come on!"

Dot's face was white, and her eyes were open wide. He carried her as gently as he could, but she had never been so terribly heavy

in his arms.

It happened at the cellar doorway, at the top of the stairs.

He stumbled, fought for balance, fell to one knee, clutched hard and Dot screamed.

But he held her, and her arms were choking at his neck.

And there was a crashing, clanging noise as the power pack fell from her, caromed from step to step, and lay finally in a shattered ruin on the cellar floor.

## CHAPTER XX

**S**LOWLY, Doug straightened, descended the stairs with Dot's trembling body still in his arms. The boys stood motionless.

There was only the sound of Dot's quiet sobbing, and that of Doug's boots as they struck hollow sounds from the steel stair treads, moved heavily as though fitted to the legs of an awkward robot to scatter the shattered bits of the power pack tubes and crush them as they came underfoot.

Gently, he put her down. The boys knelt at either side of her, Doug himself before her.

"Don't, please don't, Dot," he said.

"Oh, Doug—"

And then she clung to him, and her face was wet against his own, but they were the last of her tears.

"Afraid?"

"No. Scared a little, but just scared. I don't fear them, Doug . . . they're not worth enough to fear."

Mike and Terry had gone over to where the Contraption was, had pulled off its dust-cover, and stood looking at it as though puzzled, as though wondering why, so suddenly, it had become a worthless thing.

"Nobody's touched it, Dad," Doug heard Mike saying. "I don't think anybody's done anything to it."

Doug didn't answer, for he did not know how to tell them, how to make them know that there was no way.

"I just—just dropped it, Doug . . ."

He tried to smile, and his face felt old and tired. "We were overdue anyway," he said. "Way overdue. I guess it's against the rules to beat the odds forever."

"I just . . . just dropped it . . ."

"Don't, don't my darling. It wasn't you, don't you understand? It wasn't you, or me—the little fight we made just prolonged things for awhile. Sort of like living itself, I guess. The big system. You can let it sweep you along as it will or you can fight it if you're fool enough . . ."

"Doug! Doug, you don't believe those things!"

He felt the muscles of his face tighten, and he said nothing. No, no he did not believe them, but what difference did that make? It was the ways things were that mattered!

He picked up the broadsword Terry had let fall.

"How long—how long will it be, Doug?"

Her voice was calm; there was even a faint flush of color in her face again.

"I don't know," he said. "For awhile at least, this might seem the least logical place."

"Dad, what's in this big box? Hey, Dad!"

HE stood up, turned toward them. The kids—so full of life and the love of living, so full of the myriad curiosities that made living a colorful vibrant thing.

"This one here. Over here—a big tall wooden one."

Doug heard her quick intake of breath, turned to her.

"Before the telecall, Doug. Before they took me. A helicopter came, from the electronics place . . . they brought that box, and I—"

In quick strides he was beside Mike and Terry, and everything inside him was suddenly churned up, cold, hot . . .

Mike had wrenched a section of

planking loose, had reached inside.

"I got the label, Dad . . . High Speed Blower Rack, With Double Blower, Model 4-L532, two each —"

The final, hellish irony. As though it were not enough to fail, but to be mocked as he failed, as though Fate—or was it Providence?—could not close the incident without at least a gentle laugh at him, a cruel laugh to make light of all his confusion, his efforts and all that had driven him to make them. Doug wondered if there would be enough of the strength he would need, when he died, to laugh back.

The planking squawked as Terry pried with Mike's broadsword.

"Maybe it can help, Dad . . . maybe it can," Terry said, and he continued the prying. Mike pulled at it, and there were louder squawks as the nails protestingly surrendered.

Doug wanted to stop them, to tell them, but there could be such a little time left, and if it kept them busy there might not be time for them to become afraid.

He watched them as they ripped the top from the crate, eagerly began hauling out its contents.

Four large, wide-bladed fans, each perhaps sixteen inches in diameter, and each driven by a compact electric motor. They were

coaxially mounted on tall, slender chromium plated racks and could be adjusted on them to meet any conceivable experiment in ventilation engineering.

Doug said nothing, let them continue. It might not even be necessary to tell them that their discovery was nothing more than two ingeniously designed air conditioning units.

He wondered why they had come at all. The Prelatine Attorney's idea, perhaps, of a not-too-subtle jest. That, or even a veiled warning.

There was more squawking of wood, and in a few moments Mike and Terry had each of the units placed beside each other on the cellar floor.

"There's other junk here too," Terry was saying. "Pulleys and stuff, Dad. And a sheet of directions or something. Here, look Dad . . . maybe it'll help."

Doug looked at the smudged sheet of plastisheet that Terry had thrust in his hand. Only simple diagrams, indicating the use and assembly of the pulleys for desired variations in blower speeds. Even the simple rheostat, Doug mused, was taboo . . .

He crumpled the sheet, let it fall to the floor.

And suddenly grabbed it up again, smoothed it, looked again at

the last sentence! . . . *each motor operates on regular household direct current of 250 Kemps, as authorized by . . .*

Two hundred fifty Kemps—and there were four of the motors!

"Dot! Dot those tools by the Contraption! And any scrap wire there—hurry!"

HE worked with inhuman swiftness of desperation. Dot knelt beside him, handed him tool by tool as he asked for it, as though she were a scrub nurse and he the surgeon, with a patient that might have but moments to live.

And silently, Terry and Mike watched, eyes wide with wonderment. They watched as Doug equipped two of the motors with the large pulleys, the two others with pulleys of less than half their diameter. Then he linked them with the flat rubber belts.

"See if you can get the insulation off the ends of those wires—the ones a couple feet long are all right."

He moved the racks next to the bench, brought them close together, and when Dot handed him the wire, he had the two motors on which he had placed the small pulleys denuded of their streamlined jackets. It was between those two that he made a simple connection in series.



"Terry, Mike—while I'm making connections to the Contraption, see if you can get the fan blades off their shafts."

Two connections—two simple connections . . .

He finished the second connection.

"One more fan to go, Dad—"

He plugged the two outer motors with the large pulleys into the wall outlets above the bench. Then his fingers waited on the switches.

"But Doug the fan motors will only work on house current—"

"Yes, that's right, but I've geared—pulleyed, I mean—two of them up, so that they'll turn the other two at least twice their normal armature speed. And the simple electric motor works—"

"—in reverse, too, doesn't it! If you turn it by mechanical means, it generates electric current!"

"That's about it. I ought to get about five hundred volts from each, with the pulley ratio I'm using. And they're both connected in series, so—a thousand volts, I hope. Childish, isn't it—"

There was sudden chaos above them.

"Doug—"

Terry dropped the last fan-blade to the floor.

Doug pressed the switches, and the two electric motors spun into humming, whirring motion, driving

the other two at a speed he knew might burn them out in minutes. Then he closed the Contraption's main switch, and pulled Terry and Mike bodily to him with one arm as he held tightly to Dot with the other.

S-men swarmed down the cellar stairs.

## CHAPTER XXI

A DOZEN men clad in white uniforms of the S-Council surrounded them, and there were weapons in their hands.

Senior Quadrate Blair understood. Partially, he understood. He had been reading a banner headline, and then suddenly—suddenly there had been an indescribable moment of utter dark, of awful timelessness—and cold. And there was still the cold, tangible and fluorescing in a green-blue flame about him. Through it he could see the white blurs—the men in white. S-men . . .

"Lisa—" He felt her beside him, crushing their two sons to her trembling body. He could see their faces, then—upturned to his, pleading, afraid. "The change. Somehow my counterpart, my imposing alter-ego has succeeded, Lisa! He has found his way back, and in so doing he has returned the four of us . . ."

And then the green glow and the cold was gone, and there was no more time to speak.

"Stand where you are! You have only to move to—*Madame Blair!*"

The leader of the white-uniformed band had half-succeeded in masking his initial amazement, but now the surprise on his heavy face was a naked thing. The others stood as statues to each side of him.

There was an awful moment of silence, and the weapon-muzzles held steady, even if the dozen hands that gripped them were momentarily incapable of flexing trigger-fingers.

And then the Senior Quadrate had found his full voice.

"There has of course been some error. S-men do not enter the home of a Senior Quadrate—"

And Lisa's voice cut across her husband's.

"They—Douglas, these aren't—aren't S-men! I recognize him—the leader! Mylor Kuun . . ."

"Of course, Madame," the heavy-faced one said rapidly. "The disguises—a desperate necessity, I assure you. There is very little time, however. Once informed of your escape from the hospital, and of the Senior Quadrate's violation of arrest, it was necessary to act at once to find you. Genuine S-squads cannot be

much behind us. We're but one of a number of our groups in the search, and we came to your home only so no possibility might be overlooked. Yet I don't understand—" For a moment a look of puzzled doubt flickered on the underground leader's heavy features. His nervous gaze touched the strange array of forbidden equipment which but moments before had been bathed in the green-blue glow.

"There will be time for explanations later!" Lisa said. She caught herself as she was about to add that what the agent was saying made little sense.

She put a protective arm around each of her still, frightened children. There must be great trouble or the group would not have so brazenly exposed itself, and come here to her home. Something desperate enough so that added confusion might serve only to make a dangerous situation an impossible one.

"But I don't—you said violation of arrest," her husband was saying stubbornly. "I demand a thorough—"

"Your lives are in danger, sir. If we do not move immediately, it will very probably be not at all. Gundar Tayne is relentless, and is reported enroute from Venus to join this search himself."

"Tayne!" Blair's face blanched, then reddened. "The Taynes, you mean! Gundar and Larsen, with Larsen behind it—"

"Sir? You're being tracked down for—they say, for murdering Larsen. Please follow us sir, Madame . . ." The look of puzzled bewilderment deepened on the underground leader's face as he motioned his men in screening flanks surrounding the four. One of the men handed him a white bundle from a compact equipment-pack on his back.

"You had better get these on. We would say we have captured your boys—"

THEY were S-Council uniforms, and the Quadrate and his wife donned them quickly; Blair doing so more in hesitant imitation of Lisa's frantic haste than from the desperation of a situation which he only half-understood.

*Murdered* Larsen Tayne? Then . . . yes of course. The other Blair. But why should the other Blair hate Tayne so? He was of a different Earth, of course . . . He would think like those of his own world. He would hate all this world stood for. Hate Tayne for his overbearing, brutish use of authority—criminal cleverness at deception.

Suddenly, he knew the confusion

of panic for the first time in his life. Suddenly, his mind was a boiling thing, and all the brilliant solutions that had been forming in it with split-second rapidity were inexplicably invalid, wrong . . .

And then they were at a half-run, leaving the house, heading for a 'copter painted with the S-Council insigne, counterfeit serial code-numbers beneath it.

In moments, the craft was airborne, and Washington was falling away below them, fading away behind. And now any small thing—an incorrectly acknowledged radio challenge—would undo them, the Quadrate realized, but that was only a part of this terrible gamble they were taking. Gamble, on their very lives, yes—only why? Why?

Slowly, bit by bit, the thing pieced itself together as they flew. A great forest stretched ten miles beneath them, faded, wilted at last into desert as the first shadows of a day dying crept silently upward to engulf them.

In low tones, he and Lisa talked with the heavy-faced leader, and they talked for a long time.

"If it were not for the boys—" Blair murmured finally.

"The boys will be safe with us," Lisa answered. She looked at them, and they were sleeping, hardly looking the part now of

young warriors of broadsword and mace. "We will teach them a different way . . ."

He was silent for long moments. Then: "I cannot understand. I cannot, Lisa. That I have always believed as I have—and he, as we know he did. Yet that we should both have mortal hatred for the same men; he to the point of doing what I did not have courage to do. And now, regardless of what I believe, my own kind are hunting me down."

"They would have, had you had the courage of which you speak—the courage of that conviction. And was it, Douglas, simply a conviction about a single man?"

"I—I don't know." He looked through a port; it was night, and they were speeding silently westward. Then he was looking back to her, and deep into her eyes. He had never felt lost, alone, hunted before. There was something very wrong.

"With us, Douglas . . . will you try? To understand—with us?"

"Not because I am hunted."

"No. No. But now is the time for that wanting courage. Another man, too, hated a Tayne, and killed him. Can you help us kill the things that all Taynes stood for? In our way?"

Great mountains were looming before them, and the 'copter was

beginning to lower into their darkened maw. And suddenly he felt a new strength in him from depths of his being that were opening to him for the first time. *Another man had killed Tayne. And could he—*

"But what of the other man?" he suddenly heard himself asking. "What have I done to him? What have I done to *his* world?"

"He must be a man of great courage." Lisa answered slowly. "I think—I think such a man will find a way to undo what you have done. For such a man, and for such others as he, there is always great hope."

"You will help me, Lisa."

"All of us, Douglas."

"Then that is all I shall need," he said softly.

The 'copter vanished into the mountains.

TERRY and Mike came running from Doug's den, a welter of books open on the floor behind them which they had not opened.

Dot was coming from her bedroom. A pistol Doug owned had been in her hand, and she put it in its place in the open drawer from which she had taken it.

"Dot! Kids—the living-room, I'm in the living-room! Dot!"

In a moment they were around

him; and they were the Dot and the Mike and the Terry whose faces had been so familiar so long ago.

"I must've—he—I must've been reading this final—look, Dot, my God look—"

She saw the Page One streamer.

"Then he was—he was trying, here, he was trying, Doug . . . That was why. When I arrived, I had a pistol in my hand . . ."

The headline read **BLAIR BILL GOES TO HOUSE TOMORROW**. And in the three-column drop beneath it: *Unanimous Passage Seen—Senate Reported Favorable—President Says He'll Sign Immediately—Draft Of 13's Would Begin Nov. 15—Soviet Terms Measure 'Fantastic.'*

"Doug—"

"He's begun it all right. How, I don't know, unless—And beneath the centerfold he read **CLERGY LAUDS BLAIR BILL AT PARLEY HERE**.

"Had them falling for it, had 'em mainlined all the way!" Doug said.

And then he was going swiftly toward the den, almost at a run.

He pulled a battered chair up to the big desk, lifted his telephone from its cradle almost in a single motion.

Quietly, Dot shut the door behind him. It would be a long time, she knew, before it would

open again.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE night was quiet, and the air was warm and still.

The man and the woman walked close together, and with slow, unmeasured steps, as though the great, slumbering city was a garden, and they were exploring it for the first time.

They did not speak, for their eyes were wide, engrossed simply in seeing.

A soldier passed them, then a man who might have been a store-clerk, a student, a salesman, a clergyman, a scientist.

A young couple approached from the opposite direction, saying quiet things to each other, perhaps deciding intimate, very important plans for some near future time.

They passed an all-night drug store, its gaudy light washing the sidewalk to the curb, limning the wide racks of newspapers and magazines which told their stories in a dozen languages, on a thousand themes.

The streets were wide and empty, but they were not lonely, for in them were the silent echoes of the struggles and victories, big and small, that had been fought, won and lost in them in a day just dying, just to be born again in a

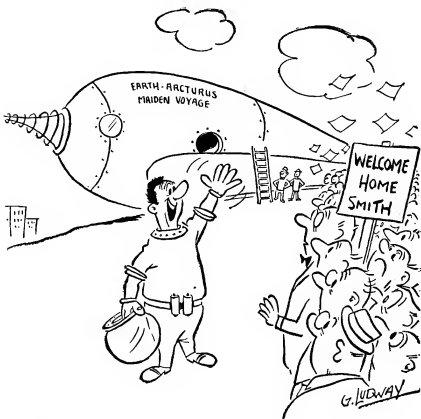
few short hours.

The man and woman walked for a long time.

And Douglas Blair thought of what would not happen tomorrow.

Not tomorrow or, perhaps with great care and the forgiveness of the Almighty, not even the day after that.

THE END



THE END OF THE WORLD

## ★ *Hell Bomb Deluxe!* ★

ACCORDING to Hans Thirring, the Austrian physicist who predicted the hydrogen bomb years before its experimental explosion in the South Pacific, unlike the regular atomic bomb, *no limit* can be placed on the size of the H-bomb!

It is estimated that H-bombs stockpiled now have the explosive force of 3.5 *megatons* (million tons) of TNT. They can utterly devastate a circle of 20 miles diameter. Thirring thinks these are "squibs". Within the decade he warns 10 metaton bombs will be standard and vastly larger ones will be in the making. In fact, he thinks it possible to construct 100 megaton or even larger H-bombs!

The thought of what such gigan-

tic hydrogen bombs can do, is appalling. Not long ago it was popular to reiterate that at last Man was capable of destroying Himself. Apparently this thought, now almost a cliché, didn't sink in.

Thirring warns that it is not alone the explosive force of the super Hell-bombs which is dreadful; more important is the fact that they will certainly alter the gene structure of every living thing on Earth. There is no hiding from a contaminated atmosphere. Physical destruction is bad enough—destruction of racial seeds is worse. Thirring points out that there is only one solution; an atomic World War must not begin, for with it Man sows his own death . . .

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## ★ *Free Fall Perils* ★

WHITE Sands rocketeers wonder about two things: can men stand cosmic rays in space, and can they endure "free-fall"—lack of gravitation? The first question is still debatable, but the latter looks like a resounding yes!

First mice went aloft in the nose of a stratospheric rocket. Moving pictures of their actions under free-fall showed them to be startled, but physically unharmed. A second and similar test, this time with a monkey, a life-form surprisingly close to Man, proved equally

successful. The monkey, under the observation of an automatic camera also, behaved amazingly calmly, almost composed, and definitely not like the victim of a wracking nausea — a condition which had been anticipated.

What monkeys can stand, men can stand better. It appears almost a certainty now that free-fall offers no terrors to a human being. And it had better be that way—or men would never be able to leave the Earth—even temporarily!

# ROLL OUT THE ROLOV!

*by*

*Harry C. Crosby*

**Maryn had to make a good impression on her date for the evening, so she took extra special care with her appearance — which wasn't her own!**

MARYN was bored. She emerged from her bath dripping and unattractive, and waited resignedly as the Warm-Dry blew her lank young hair back from her forehead. The autotape whipped out and took the measurements of her immature figure.

From the bedroom nearby, the memory box spoke with her mother's recorded voice: "Hurry up, Maryn."

"Yes, Mother," said Maryn obediently, knowing the memory-box would record her answer.

"It's almost eight," said her mother's voice, timed to go off when it was almost eight.

"Yes, Mother," said Maryn obediently.

"Well, you'd better hurry. Jackson won't want to be kept waiting."

"Yes, Mother," said Maryn. She pressed her hand along the flat length of her body and found she was dry. She waved her hand through the light beam and the Warm-Dry clicked off with a dying sigh. Maryn stepped on the travel-rug and pressed with her toes. The travel-rug slid with her into a luxurious bedroom.

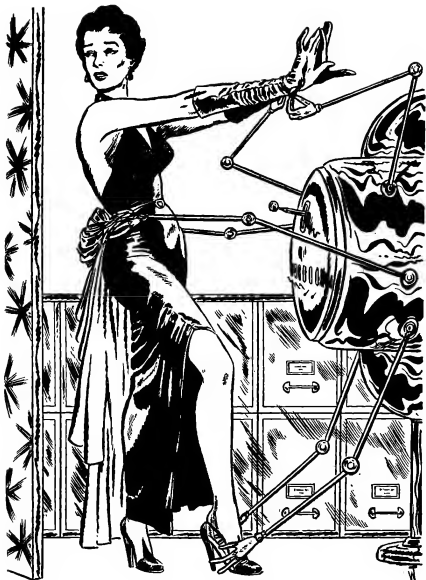
"Jackson won't want to be kept waiting, Maryn," said her mother's voice from the memory box.

"No, Mother," said Maryn. The "Jackson" her mother referred to was young Jackson Mellibant VII, just down from Herriman College. To her mother's delight, he had asked Maryn for a date.

"Remember," said her mother, "the Mellibants are very influential. You may not have another chance like this."

"No, Mother," groaned Maryn.





She pressed down with her heels and the rug stopped before a pastel pink egg about five feet high. Maryn pressed down with the toes of her left foot and the heel of her right. The rug pivoted her around. Maryn passed her hand through a beam of blue light and the egg snicked open. Maryn stepped in and it closed around her, leaving only her head outside.

"Maryn," said her mother's voice, "I do think you should hurry. Are you getting your foundation yet?"

"Yes, Mother," said Maryn, who was now being buffeted about slightly, within the egg. Inside the pastel pink, egg-shaped machine, her body was being, as the advertisement put it, reborn.

"Remember," said her mother, "you must look your best, Maryn."

"Yes, Mother."

"Now, Maryn," said her mother's voice from the box, "remember if he gets—forward—you aren't to be naive."

"No, Mother," groaned Maryn.

"Lead him on, Maryn. Remember, the Mellibants are very influential."

"Yes, Mother."

"And Maryn, if he should—if he should—well, come up after your date, you're to use the rolov, do you understand?" Her moth-

er's voice rose warningly. "Not yourself, do you understand?"

"Yes, Mother," Maryn mumbled.

"I don't want you to feel hurt, Maryn, but you simply wouldn't do. What's the use of having these great technical advances if we don't use them? I've set the rolov so it will have your exact foundation, and he'll never know the difference. That way you'll both have a better time. Well, I'm glad that's settled. Have a good time, dear."

"Yes, Mother," murmured Maryn. The egg snicked open and Maryn stepped out. She raised her hands and felt the soft voluptuous curves of the dead plastic fastened upon her. She was now, according to the advertisement, "—Reborn—With mystery, with glamor, with the body beautiful to make men lie at your feet and cry aloud for your favor." She had, according to the advertisement, left behind the drabness of her "everyday self." Well, most of it, anyway. Maryn stuck her head into another pink pastel egg to get rid of the rest of it.

"Hurry, Maryn," said her Mother, as Maryn stood with her head in the egg.

"Glub," said Maryn. The egg ejected her head.

"Hurry," said her mother's

voice.

"Yes, Mother," said Maryn. She stepped on the rug, dug in her toes and slid to the dressing machine. This sat like a great metal spider behind a flowered screen in the corner of the room. All the craft of a hundred designers had yet to make a dressing machine attractive, and Maryn approached it with the remains of childhood dread. Once she had started it, the long shiny metal arms flashed over her and Maryn lost her fear in boredom. She was always at first a little afraid the machine would spin a cocoon around her and hang her up for a trophy, but as usual it dutifully spun a dress about her. This time, Maryn was surprised to find the dress a trifle tighter than usual.

"Maryn," said her mother's voice.

"Yes, Mother?"

"You're in the dressing machine, aren't you?"

"Yes, Mother," Maryn raised her legs alternately for the shoes and stockings.

"Hurry," said her mother. "And don't reset the machine. I have it set properly now."

MARYN stood stock still till the dressing machine went *click* and a series of chimes played a tune, signifying that mi-

lady might now profitably move on to the finisher. Maryn pressed down heel and toe and slid around the screen to a pastel rose-and-gilt box about the size and shape of an upended coffin. Double doors popped open and a light lit up the wine colored interior. Maryn stepped in.

"Hurry, Maryn," came her mother's muffled voice.

"Yes, Mother," said Maryn. She shut her eyes and stood still as a hundred tiny nozzles opened and squirted perfume. A hot breeze fluffed her hair.

Somewhere outside, a chime announced the arrival of Jackson Mellibant VII.

"Hurry, Maryn," said her mother's voice, in a special peremptory tone. As a child, Maryn had been greatly impressed by the memory box. Now she understood that her mother had merely sat down for a minute and rattled off her comments, touching the spacer button to put three minutes between this one and the next, and setting a special comment to be made when the dressing machine went on and another to be said when the front door chimed.

The finisher opened up and Maryn stepped out onto the travel rug. On her way out, she had a brief glance at herself in a full length mirror. To an outsider,

the effect was designed to be one of lush beauty, combined with serene sophistication and impeccable breeding. Maryn herself had the impression she was watching a popular solido heroine setting out on her stereotyped adventure for the Caswell Brewing Co.

"Remember, Maryn," hissed her mother's voice, "use the rolov, not yourself."

"Yes, Mother," groaned Maryn, as she slid out the bedroom door and down the hall to the living room. She sighed miserably and ran her tongue over her teeth. Their surface felt unnaturally slick and slippery, and Maryn realized that somewhere along the line they had received a coating of Shinywhite. She wondered where. Momentarily distracted by this question, she did not at first see the tall, handsome, sophisticated, and impeccably-bred figure of Jackson Mellibant VII. She caught only the tail end of his flashing smile as he pivoted on his rug and raised his arm. Together, the two of them slid out the door and down the spiral ramp to the waiting car.

THE evening passed in stifled perfection. Jackson Mellibant VII said precisely the right thing at exactly the right time. Maryn, well-drilled at the Lace-mont Finishing School, found it

impossible to give anything but the perfectly right reply. She and Jackson whirled around the dance floor with marvelous grace and precision, their feet locked to smooth metal disks, their motion controlled by the electronic calculator in the night club basement.

At the tables, Maryn and Jackson drank a good deal of champagne, which was automatically removed from their stomachs by the teleporter. The drive home in Jackson's car had, therefore, no element of hazard, since Jackson had no difficulty punching the proper destination on the key-board.

On the drive home, carried out at precisely the city speed limit, Maryn sat in futile boredom as Jackson took up her hand and made a lyrical speech concerning it. Maryn's mouth opened and gave a neatly-turned reply. This led coyly on from stage to stage according to the established routine of Caswell Breweries' heroines, till at last they reached home. The car stopped itself by the walk. "My, the house seems lonely," said Maryn, with the correct degree of impropriety. She studied her gloves. "My parents," she added, "never get home till round three."

"Perhaps," said Jackson, "I might come up for a few minutes. Just to see that everything's all

right."

"That," said Maryn, who felt like screaming and hammering on walls, "is very thoughtful of you." They slid up the ramp together. Maryn turned to Jackson and flashed her Shinywhite smile at him. In turn he bent and kissed her plastic shoulder.

Together, they slid in through the living room. Maryn glanced sidewise at Jackson as they slid past the sofa. She was afraid he might choose to continue operations there. A moment later, they entered the hallway. This evidently required more intimacy, as he now put his arm around her waist.

At the bedroom door, they came to a halt. "You'll wait here for a moment?" she asked, putting her hand on his arm.

"Don't be long," he whispered.

In the living room, there was a faint rumble.

Maryn stiffened. "Did you hear that?"

"What?" asked Jackson, standing with one hand in his side pocket.

"That noise," said Maryn, becoming alarmed. "In the living room," she whispered. "Would you—"

"I most certainly shall," said Jackson, gallantly. He slid off down the hallway and Maryn waited in rising alarm till he call-

ed. "Perfectly all right. Nothing here."

"Thank Heaven," said Maryn, feeling her first genuine emotion of the evening. If Jackson had been on hand, she might have thrown her arms around him and kissed him, but he was still in the living room. Relapsing into boredom, Maryn slid into the bedroom and pulled back the covers. There on the sheets as a reminder was the small flat black box that controlled the rolov. Maryn stabbed one of the buttons, and the discreetly hidden door by the bed opened up. Out rumbled the lifelike rolov, and Maryn sat it on the bed, swung its feet off the travel platform, and slid the platform back into the closet. She closed the closet door, and worked the controls so that the rolov clumsily got into bed and lay down on its side. This part of the rolov's repertoire was not automatic, and took a certain amount of facility with the control box. Maryn, seeing how awkwardly the rolov got into bed, was grateful she did not have to make it walk anywhere. She stood looking at this model of her present appearance and had to admit that, except for the eyes, it looked lifelike. She laid her hand on its shoulder. It was cold as an oyster.

A gentle tap sounded on the bed-

room door.

"Just a minute," breathed Maryn, hastily stabbing the warm-up and breathing buttons. She flicked off the lights.

The door opened, and a dark form slid quickly in.

"Over here," whispered Maryn, crouching by the bed.

"Darling," murmured the passionate voice of Jackson Mellibant VII.

Maryn pressed the automatic button.

"Darling," breathed the rolov, in a voice like pure fire.

MARYN, unable to stand it, slipped out of the room. She did not doubt she could leave this end of the evening to the built-in skill of the rolov, but she did not think she could bear to watch it. With the hot murmurings still faintly audible behind her, she tiptoed wearily down the hallway and walked into the living room.

On the sofa, reading the night's paper, sprawled Jackson Mellibant VII, his face a study in boredom.

Maryn stood transfixed.

Jackson, flipping the paper, glanced up, snapped the paper around and looked at it. An instant later he glanced up again at Maryn. "Eh!" he gasped, his eyes wide.

"Well!" said Maryn.

For a moment they stared at each other. "You're not in—there!" Jackson commented stupidly.

"What about you?" snapped Maryn.

For a moment they stared at each other vacantly, then Jackson's face took on a look of shrewd calculation. "Come on," he said. She followed him down the hallway, holding tightly to his hand. They bent to listen at the bedroom door. Giggling murmurs came from within.

Jackson started to shake silently. He pulled her back to the living room and burst out laughing.

"I don't see anything funny about it," snapped Maryn. "Who's in there?"

Jackson sank down on the couch and laughed all the harder.

"Some *friend* of yours?" Maryn demanded icily.

Jackson choked and gasped for breath. "Whew!" he said. "Friend? He tried to stop laughing and failed. He put his hand on Maryn's arm, as if for patience, and she struck it away angrily. She stamped her foot.

"Maryn," said Jackson between bursts of laughter, "did you put a rolov in there?"

"What if I did?" she demanded angrily. "That's better than you—you—"

"No," said Jackson, "you don't understand." He took a small flat black box out of his side pocket and held it up. "I put one in there, too," he said.

As Maryn stared, he started to laugh again. "Two love-making machines," he gasped, "locked in steely embrace. Ye gods, there's progress, for you!"

"I don't think that's very funny," said Maryn. "Why did you have to send a machine in?"

"Oh," said Jackson. "The Murches are very influential people. Miss Maryn Murch must have nothing but the best."

"But—" Maryn stared at him. Jackson Mellibant VII was the precise image of exact physical and social perfection. Very clearly, he *was* the best. Maryn said so.

"Oh no," said Jackson. "Don't judge others by yourself. I'm all sham and pretense. You don't get strong leading the lives we lead today. I couldn't compare with that machine."

"You mean," said the startled Maryn, "that you're *made-up*?"

"That's it," said Jackson, rising sadly to his feet. "I'm a fraud,

a fake. Well, I'll get my machine and be going."

"Wait a minute," said Maryn, taking him by the arm.

"What?"

"I want to talk to you."

"Still?" he looked at her in surprise.

"Yes."

"What about the machines?"

"Oh, they can blow a fuse for all I care," said Maryn. "Won't you sit down?"

"M'm. All right," said Jackson.

She smiled at him and rested her head on his shoulder.

\* \* \*

It was well into the morning when Maryn's mother returned, went directly to the memory box in the bedroom and ran it through. "Well," she said to Maryn, "everything seems to have gone off very nicely. Did he ask for another date?"

Maryn nodded.

"That's good," said her mother. "Remember, Maryn, the Mellibants are very influential people. You must *still* do your best."

"Yes, Mother," said Maryn, obediently. "I will."

## IS YOUR FILE OF IMAGINATION COMPLETE?

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# GUARANTEED — FOREVER!

*by*

*Frank M. Robinson*

**Manning had spent his life exposing mail order frauds. But Forsythe's outfit topped them all. Its products were too good to exist — yet!**

CLARK Street, just north of Chicago's Loop, was the symbol of a million things, all of them bad, Manning thought. Bumpy paving bricks rutted with street car tracks and bordered on both sides by cheap saloons and quarter-a-night flop houses. Hot summer nights when the drunks clustered like flies on the sidewalks and Newberry Park was crowded with cranks trying to save the world and floozies just trying to make a living in it. Old magazine stores where a nickle bought a copy of an old comic magazine and a five spot bought photographs guaranteed to make a high school kid's eyes pop out.

Clark Street, where a thousand and one manufacturing gyp artists had office space.

He slowed the car and went through the motions of parking. He jockeyed it in towards the curb.

There was a scraping sound, and he cut the motor.

"You ought to watch it, Fred," Wheeler said. "You scraped the paint."

"It's just a scratch," Manning said quietly. "Just the fender."

"You scrape a fender on these models," Wheeler said doggedly, "and you have to get a whole new paint job. It costs money."

Manning looked coldly at the fat man sitting next to him.

"The government's got money; it can afford it."

The fat man shrugged and changed the subject. "How did the biopsy come out?"

"I don't know." Somewhere deep inside Manning a dozen tiny hands plucked a pain nerve. "The doctor will send me a report in a couple of days." The doctor had already told him that morning but he didn't want Wheeler to know.





"Let's forget it. Who's on the list this time?"

Wheeler pulled a crumpled newspaper ad out of his pocket. "The Forsythe Company. They make carburetors."

Manning leaned back in the seat and stared a long time at the faded store fronts that lined the street. He was only half listening to Wheeler. Malignancy, the doctor had said. He knew what that meant. Curtains. Humpty Dumpty was splashed all over the pavement and all the high voltage x-ray machines and all the little isotope capsules from the AEC weren't going to help a bit.

He forced the thought into the back of his mind and locked and barred the mental door.

"What's the sales pitch?"

"A hundred miles to the gallon."

"That's rather high. Most of them are content with fifty."

Wheeler grunted. "That's not all. This guy doesn't use gas. He gets a hundred to a gallon of water."

"What's he pricing it at?"

"About the usual range. Three forty-nine."

Manning frowned. "Let me see that."

The fat man handed it over and Manning ran his eyes down the ad. It was the usual ad, complete with the enthusiastic testimonials sign-

ed by "A. Z." of Salt Lake City and "Mrs. D. F." of Podunk Corners. After running end around all the glowing adjectives in the body of the ad, you got the idea you could get a hundred miles from a gallon of ordinary tap water when you used the Forsythe Carburetor.

The trade name was bad, of course. Simply, the "Forsythe Carburetor." Not the "Jiffy" or the "E-Z" or the "Little Marvel." But the price was right in there. Three forty-nine, with a double-your-money-back guarantee if not absolutely satisfied. The typical gyp ad. Something that promised a hell of a lot in the way of savings and mileage with a low enough price so the suckers would be willing to risk it.

"Let's go." Manning got out of the car, on the street side because of the high curb, and glanced at the numbers on the buildings. A few doors down, on the other side.

THE building was a three story brick, and old. The office of Forsythe Carburetor Company was one flight up, at the end of a hallway where the wooden flooring creaked and groaned and threatened to give way at any moment. The lettering on the door was neat and precise; there was no buzzer.

Manning knocked, an authoritative type of knock.

The man who opened the door was in his early sixties, Manning judged. Maybe a little more, maybe a little less. A big man, with thick shoulders and a head of black hair that was just turning to white and a friendly face with just enough lines in it to show it had been around. You got the idea that being a pitchman was second nature, that he had been in the sales racket for a long time.

"Mind if we go in?"

The big man shrugged easily. "Sure, come on in. Didn't think any customers would call personally."

Once inside, Manning gave him a cold, official stare. "You Forsythe?"

The man nodded, frowning. "Something wrong?"

The innocent act, Manning thought. There's nobody here but us chickens, boss. He flipped open his suit coat so the badge showed. "We're from the Federal Fraud Investigating Agency, Mr. Forsythe."

He let it hang there. The usual response was a whitening of the face, a frightened look, and then a request for credentials. Wheeler was already reaching into his pocket for a sheaf of them; FFIA men had to carry enough creden-

tials to sink a battleship. But Forsythe didn't whiten, didn't look frightened, and didn't ask for proof that they really represented the FFIA.

"I don't understand, Mister . . . ?"

"Manning." He made himself comfortable in a chair by the desk and glanced around. It wasn't an impressive layout. Actually little more than a mailing room. Packages stacked up against the rear wall, ready for mailing, a wrapping table, and a Pitney-Bowes machine. Crude, almost too crude.

"How long have you been in the racket, Forsythe?"

Forsythe leaned back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head. "You might say I've been a huckster all my life, Mr. Manning."

Life-long pitchman, Manning figured coldly. Helped the medicine man when he was a youngster and ran away with a carnival when he was in his teens. During the Depression he probably had a set-up on a street corner selling spot remover, dealt in nylons during the war, and saved enough to branch out in a big way after the war was over.

"Look, Forsythe, I don't know who put you on to this racket or whether you're fronting for somebody else or not, but it's no go. Somebody complains and then we

have to crack down on you. We call it fraudulent use of the mails, con games, or what have you. And an incident under any one of them will get you ten to twenty at the local state penitentiary."

Forsythe didn't look at all worried.

"Have there been any complaints?"

Wheeler was standing by the door, carefully snipping the end off of a cigar. He said, "Not yet. But we like to stop trouble before it starts. And it costs good money to investigate, to run tests. We do the public a favor by warning you off the market, and we do you a favor by saving you a stretch in the little brick house by the river."

"There won't be any trouble," Forsythe said with an earnestness that seemed oddly out of place. "Actually the carburetor will give you closer to two hundred miles to the gallon."

"On pure H two O, eh?"

Forsythe nodded cheerfully. "That's right. It's actually H sixteen O eight, by the way."

**M**ANNING felt a vein throb over his right temple. You try to do them a favor and that's what you got. Wise guys. The whole world was full of wise guys. All of them wanted to make a million overnight and they didn't care

how they did it. And all of them thought they could get away with it. Okay, so Forsythe would have to learn the hard way. He stood up.

"You take cash or check, Forsythe?"

"What for?"

"For a carburetor." Manning paused, "The government will test it and the government will be the complainant. And I wouldn't advise packing up and leaving if I were you. We've got ways of finding you."

Forsythe pursed his lips. "What kind of a car do you have?"

"Ford," Wheeler said slowly. "A fifty-three model."

Forsythe picked a package off the stack in the rear and made out a receipt for the check. "You won't complain. You'll get close to a hundred and ninety-five."

Wise, Manning thought again, bitterly. He picked up the package. "See you around, Forsythe. Soon."

Outside, Manning shot a glance back at the building and the neat lettering on the second floor window. "I think we ought to test that carburetor ourselves. And I think we ought to check up on our friend, Forsythe."

Wheeler looked surprised. "Why so eager? The Bureau will test it."

Manning started the car. "It'll take six months for the Bureau to get around to it. And in the meantime, our wise friend will be making hay while the sun shines."

Wheeler laughed. "Hell, he'll be lucky if he makes his rent. Didn't seem like a bad guy, though."

Manning's hands tightened on the wheel. "He's a huckster, Ray. A cheap, grafting little huckster who's too damn big for his britches. And I'm going to see that he gets exactly what he deserves."

Wheeler looked worried. "Don't ever get too personal about it, Fred. You gotta have an objective viewpoint all the time."

Maybe he was making too much of it, Manning thought coldly. But when everything else went to pot you liked to . . . bury yourself in your work.

"**M**ORE coffee, Fred?" "Yeah. Cream and sugar it, Judy." He poked at the thing on the table with a pencil. "What do you think of it, Ray?"

Wheeler nibbled at his sandwich, looking like a slightly overstuffed beaver. "I don't make a damn thing out of it. It doesn't look like anything I've ever seen before. What did you take it apart for?"

"See what makes it tick—if it does. And I wanted to know who

made it. A lot of manufacturers stamp their parts either with a trademark or some other kind of identifying symbol."

But the pieces that lay on the table before him didn't have identifying marks of any kind on them. They were beautifully machined, Manning thought. Nice machining and lots of chrome and the tolerances must have been out of this world. And so what?

His wife came back with a steaming cup of coffee and Manning dangled a doughnut in it. The simple things, he thought abstractly. That was what made life worth living, that was what he was going to miss.

"You got any idea how it works?" Wheeler asked.

Manning shook his head. "I don't think it works at all. A convincing hunk of machinery, something that looks pretty but does nothing."

Wheeler pointed a stubby forefinger at a small cube of metal, approximately three inches on the side, that was apparently the heart of the carburetor. "What do you think that's for?"

"I don't know. It's a sealed unit, something like they have in refrigerators and washing machines. Exactly what it does, I couldn't tell you."

"This doesn't look like the ordin-

any gadget racket to me," Wheeler said uneasily. "I think we ought to call the Bureau in on it."

Manning shrugged. "National will find out all about it when we submit our report."

"You going to open up the sealed unit?"

Manning hesitated, then shook his head. "No. If we open it before we test the whole thing, then Forsythe would say we tampered with the gadget and naturally it wouldn't perform as he claimed."

He reassembled it, then pushed it across the table to Wheeler. "It's your baby, Ray. You test it. I've got something else to do."

Wheeler carefully wrapped the gadget in a chamois and stuffed it back in the box. He cornered another doughnut and sloshed it around in the bottom of his cup. "What did you have in mind?"

"I'm curious about Forsythe," Manning said. "I want to know more about him. Who he is, where he comes from, that sort of thing. There might be more to this than just Forsythe, you know. He's just the sales front; I think there's an organization behind him."

"You want to be a hero, Fred?"

Manning smiled crookedly. "I couldn't think of a better time."

"You just never struck me as

the type," Wheeler said quietly.

Manning felt a little cheap. The private eye type of thing wasn't his line; he was pushing it only because, win, lose or draw, it would make damn little difference to him.

THE building agent was a small, balding man with a taste for two hundred dollar suits and a Michigan Boulevard office. He looked guilty when Manning showed his credentials.

"Anything I can do to help you, Mr. Manning—anything at all—just ask me." His forehead looked a little shinier than when Manning had first come in.

"I'd like to ask questions about one Harry Forsythe; he's running the Forsythe Carburetor Company in your building on North Clark Street."

The building agent looked cautious. "Is something wrong?"

"Could be," Manning said slowly. "We're investigating him."

"I'm not my brother's keeper, Mr. Manning." The agent laughed, a little hollowly. "You know how it is. We'll rent to almost anybody who comes along. They don't always tell us full details of their business although, believe me, we try to rent to only true Americans."

Manning felt tired.

"We're not chasing commies.

This is just a simple case of fraudulent use of the mails. Nothing that will involve you in any way."

The man dabbed at his forehead with a light blue, silk handkerchief. He looked a lot more cheerful.

"We'll be glad to cooperate in any way we can."

Manning helped himself to a cigar from the open box on the desk. "Thanks. You can begin right now. Did Forsythe present any credentials or references when he rented his office?"

The agent held up his hands.

"We don't require references or credentials, Mr. Manning. They tell us what business they're in and that's about all we ask them."

"And Forsythe said he was in the manufacturing and sales business, right?"

"Actually a little more than that. He mentioned something about being in the antique business, too."

Manning felt incredulous. "Didn't you think it strange that a whole manufacturing business could fit in an office that was no bigger than this one, let alone an antique business? His carburetor is made of metal; it requires stamping, machining, spraying. A whole factory full of machines would be required!"

The agent started to sweat again.

"I think I told you that we don't ask them detailed questions, Mr. Manning. In this case it seems obvious that he's using the office only as a sales outlet. Somebody else supplies him with the carburetors."

Manning bit savagely into the end of his cigar.

"I thought of that. I've had his office shadowed for the last week. He's had everything else delivered to him—refrigerators and typewriters and sofas and stoves. But no carburetors."

The agent looked a little smug. "It's a free country, Mr. Manning, he can order what he wants. And if your men didn't see any carburetors, then I would start to worry about their reliability. Forsythe must get his carburetors from somewhere and he must have them delivered."

Manning flushed and stood up to leave. "And if I were you, I'd start to worry about whom I rented office space to. And I'd start to worry about the condition I kept my buildings in. I would've sworn that there were at least a dozen violations of the civic fire ordinance there."

"But really, Manning! I had no . . ."

Manning started for the door.

"Thanks for all the information I didn't get. And thanks for the cigar."

HE stood on the street for a few minutes after leaving the building agent's office. It was a hot summer day, the only relief being the slight breeze that blew off the lake. The street was crowded with men in seer sucker suits, sweltering in the heat and mopping their foreheads. Young girls in thin blouses and light weight skirts, as young girls always seemed to do, managed to look cool and fresh.

His last summer, Manning thought slowly. Take a good look and enjoy it while you can.

He walked slowly towards the Loop, looking at the scenery along the way as if he had never seen it before. It was a great world, he thought. But you didn't begin to appreciate it until you found out that one of these days you weren't going to be around any more.

He stopped in at a cigar store near Madison street.

"Some fine Havanas just came in, Mr. Manning."

There was a time when he had thought about cutting down on smoking. It didn't make much difference now.

"A half dozen should do it, Jeff."

The clerk wrapped them up. "Any razor blades or shaving cream? And we got a new order of fountain pens. Guaranteed to last a lifetime without re-filling."

Manning stuffed the package of cigars into his pocket. "No thanks. I don't care much for ball-point pens anyway."

The clerk looked a little disappointed. "Pens are kind of hard to move during summer; guess most people think of them as Christmas presents. That's what I tried to tell the man who sold them to me. They're not real ball-points, though."

Guaranteed to last a lifetime, Manning thought suddenly. A lifetime. Not just for a year or for a solid mile of writing—but a lifetime.

"Let me see one."

It looked like an ordinary pen, the style obviously patterned after a Parker. There was some engraving on the clip. Manning held it up to the light and read it. A Forsythe pen.

"How much?"

"Two forty-nine. Good looking pen for that price."

And what did you get, Manning thought, outside of a stainless steel clip and a fancy plastic barrel? Ten to one it leaked all over you the first time you clipped it in your pocket.



"Did you try them out before you bought them, Jeff?"

"Sure — worked pretty good, too."

For the first few days. Manning thought sourly. And then, like the one horse shay, it probably fell apart all at once.

"Wrap one up. And give me a copy of the newspaper."

He took the paper to the reading room of the public library at Randolph and Michigan and thumbed through it. Wheeler had missed a lot, he thought. There were Forsythe Carburetors, good for a hundred miles to the gallon of water; Forsythe pens, good for a lifetime; Forsythe lipsticks that would last for years; Forsythe hairbrushes with bristles that never broke.

All everyday items, all with impossible claims, and all attractively cheap.

Forsythe wasn't doing things in a small way, Manning thought slowly. But where did he get the goods? And who made them? And if Forsythe was a front, who for?

CLARK Street in the late evening was a canyon of yellow street lights intermingled with the flicker of red neon. Manning stood in the shadow of a store front, watching the building across the street. The lights were out in all

the windows; the building was dead.

He walked around the block and came up the alley in back. A cat leaped silently off a window ledge and Manning smiled to himself. No watch dogs. The rear door was locked but not barred and a thin sliver of strong steel inserted between the frame and the door sprung the lock with a small click. He closed it quietly behind him, listening for any sounds in the building. There were none.

He picked the lock on the Forsythe office and eased himself in. The crates and the packages were in the back room, a small filing cabinet by the window. He opened the cabinet and rifled through the two top drawers. There was nothing but mail orders from all over the country addressed to the Forsythe Company. A small but steady volume of business over a period of about six months.

The bottom drawer was something else again. Invoices between the Forsythe Company and the Timely Trading Corporation of Oswego City, New America. Shipments and receipted bills. Manning looked at them blankly.

There wasn't any Oswego City, New America.

And Forsythe didn't pay off in money. He paid off in refrigerators.

And electric stoves,  
And furniture.  
And sport cars.

It didn't make sense, Manning thought, unless it was some kind of cover-up.

There was a rattle at the closed door and Manning ducked behind a crate. The door swung open and Forsythe came in, followed by another man. Forsythe flicked on the light switch and made himself comfortable at the desk. The stranger, a younger, somewhat smaller man, glanced shrewdly around the office.

"You don't have much of a lay-out here, Forsythe."

Manning watched the stranger carefully. He had the same sort of detached attitude that Forsythe seemed to have; the attitude you had when you went to a museum, Manning thought suddenly.

"We do all right," Forsythe said cheerfully. "A volume of half a million dollars last year."

"You trade right up to the limit, don't you?" the stranger asked casually.

"Right to the limit. How about you?"

"Not so good. I've got a poor territory. It seems capitalism went out of style thirty years ago."

Forsythe chuckled. "That's the way it goes when the corporation hands out territories. You pays

your money and you takes your choice." He paused. "What did you want to see me about?"

THE stranger suddenly stood up. Something cold and metallic glittered in his hand.

"You've got a good territory, Forsythe. Better than you deserve. And much better than mine."

Forsythe paled. "What do you intend to do?"

The stranger's voice was menacing. "This is a rough age, Forsythe. Any one of a dozen things can happen to a huckster in an age like this."

There was the faint click of metal against metal and the stranger sighted down the weapon at Forsythe, pale and sweating in the chair.

Manning stood up from behind the crate.

"I wouldn't, if I were you."

The stranger whirled. "Who are you?"

"Just an interested spectator." Manning started to walk forward. "I think you ought to put that gun down."

The weapon lined up with Manning's chest. "No further, please."

It was quiet in the room. Forsythe was pale, his eyes darting from one to the other. The stranger's thin face was grim and a lit-

tle frightened. Manning's was impassive. Of the three of them, he was the only one who didn't give a damn what happened.

"Put it down, son."

There was a slight muscular tensing in the stranger's hand and Manning dropped to the floor, rolling so he hit the stranger's legs. Then the man was down, grunting heavily as he hit the floor. Manning caught the gun hand and tried to bend it back, to force the stranger to release the weapon. Then the man kned him in the stomach and Manning suddenly loosened his grip, gasping. The stranger ducked around Forsythe and dove for the door; then he was gone, his footsteps echoing down the hallway.

Manning got up and dusted off his pants. Forsythe was standing by the door, looking somewhat dazed by the sudden turn of events.

"Maybe I should've let him finish you off," Manning said in a tired voice. "It would have saved the state money."

Forsythe brushed back his hair with a shaking hand. "Thanks a lot for saving my life, Manning. I appreciate it."

"Think nothing of it," Manning said cynically. "But if you're so grateful, how about telling me what this is all about? Who manufac-

tures your goods, who's behind you?"

Forsythe shook his head. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you, Manning. And I can't tell you."

"That makes a lot of sense," Manning said sourly. He started for the door. "I'm going to send the cops back to watch this place. It might be a good idea to take you into protective custody, too."

Forsythe smiled faintly.

"Before you leave, Manning, I'd like to give you something." He shoved a package into Manning's hands. "Take this as a gift."

Manning slipped the small package into his pocket. "You shouldn't have done that," he said tightly. "Don't you know what the penalties are for bribing an agent of the government?"

Forsythe looked hurt. "But this isn't a bribe, Manning."

Manning laughed curtly. "Tell it to a court."

HE slept late the next morning. He opened the package after breakfast. When he did, his face grew white and his hands trembled slightly. Forsythe had somehow guessed. And rubbed it in.

He looked at the small bottle closely and held it up to the light. There wasn't any such thing, of course, no matter how hard he wished there was. It was sheer

quackery. A laboratory analysis would reveal a bottle of sugar water. There wasn't any doubt but what Forsythe was trying to peddle it, along with his fountain pens and carburetors. Exhibit A against the Forsythe Company, he thought.

He crossed over to the telephone stand by the window. It was raining out, a summer thunder shower where the clouds boiled black against the sky and the rain beat against the glass with a hundred hands, trying to force its way inside. A dull and gloomy day that went well with the way he felt.

He dialed Wheeler.

"Ray? How's Forsythe?"

Wheeler's voice was dry.

*"I don't know, Fred. His office is cleaned out. He's disappeared. He was gone by the time the cops got to his office last night."*

They would have to do the leg work all over again, Manning thought slowly. But it shouldn't be hard to do. Pitchmen always stayed in the same business, even if they had to get a different tent occasionally.

"What about the carburetor?"

Wheeler laughed a little bitterly.

*"I gave it to the kid to install in the car. He did. Claimed it actually ran on water, but that's something we'll never know for sure. Kid was in an accident this morning. Nothing happened to*

*him but the whole engine block is demolished. So's the carburetor.*

But Wheeler's son had claimed it actually worked, Manning thought chaotically. That it was the real McCoy. And Jeff at the cigar store had claimed the pens had actually worked, too.

What if it was all on the level? Oswego City, New America. There wasn't any such place. Not yet, there wasn't. But sometime in the future? And what better way of merchandising than selling goods at different times in history, goods that fit right in with the times? You wouldn't want to flood the market, of course, but you could make a tidy profit. In money? Hell no. Hadn't the building agent said Forsythe was an antique dealer?

Stoves, refrigerators, sports cars. In some future age they would be valuable as . . . antiques. Forsythe said he had been a huckster all his life. Where? And when? Maybe hucksters like Forsythe had peddled stainless steel swords and shields to the Roman legions. And maybe a huckster had stopped by to see Gutenberg about a small matter of printing paper . . .

And in his own age, hidden among all the ads for quack remedies and miraculous gadgets, there were a few ads that were genuine. Some people probably had carbur-

etors that ran on water and some office workers pens that never wore out and maybe some high school girl used a lipstick that was going to last her the rest of her life.

And a time machine would explain where Forsythe got the carburetors and other goods without having them delivered through the streets, and it explained how he got rid of the stoves and refrigerators and goods that came into his office.

Manning suddenly wished that Forsythe hadn't taken off. The man had something now that would be a sure fire sale. And people needed it desperately, far more

than they needed gadgets or carburetors or pens or hairbrushes.

Wheeler's voice was buzzing on the phone.

*"What do we do with the case now, Fred?"*

Manning glanced out the window again. It was a beautiful day, the clouds were black velvet and the rain drops were diamonds.

He looked down at the small vial in his hand. The label read: *Forsythe's Cancer Cure*.

The real McCoy.

Manning lifted the phone and spoke into it.

"We don't have a case any more, Ray." He paused, then said: "I just swallowed Exhibit A."



"Your new permanent isn't holding very well, eh, Alice?"



# THE MUSIC MASTER

*by*

*J. L. Wallace*

**Robots could play an instrument, but they could not write music—and Danny wanted to do both—even if it meant facing the psych squad!**

**A**FTER the performers filed off stage the audience chattered politely and drifted toward the exits. Danny Tocar looked up at his mother, and, on impulse, detached his hand from hers and lingered behind. As long as she was busy culturizing he wouldn't be missed.

When the auditorium was empty Danny made his way to the stage and stood among the instruments. He stroked a violin, dark and shining. It was very heavy, as if it were solid. It was solid. He touched the metallic ridges on it. Funny. When he had sat in the audience those ridges had looked



like strings and had given out a pleasant sound. It made no sound for him though, even when he drew the bow across it as the musician had done.

It was the same with the drum when he pounded it. It too was silent. He frowned and tried the trumpet. He lifted the instrument to his lips and puffed his cheeks and blew. Nothing happened at all. He examined it intently and then sadly laid it down. It was fake. All the instruments were toys, imitations of something that had once been real.

The music had not been phony, though. He visualized the performance, a harmony of motions as well as sound: bowing, plucking, striking, blowing. Where had the music come from if not from the instruments? He still remembered the synphony.

There was one instrument much larger than the others. It was set on a raised platform and looked different. He wandered toward it, and discovered the enclosure. From the audience he hadn't noticed this; the enclosure was hardly visible though he was leaning against it.

He had experience with this sort of thing. A museum case; a guarantee that whatever was inside was real. With practiced fingers he felt for an invisible crevice in the transparent enclosure. A

finger nail split, but something swung open, and Danny was inside.

He looked curiously at it. A large wooden instrument with white markings along the front of it. Danny remembered how these had been touched during the performance.

He was good at imitation; Danny brought his fingers down the way he had seen it done. The white things weren't markings: they were keys. The sound rolled out into the empty auditorium. Startled, Danny jerked his hands away. He didn't know it, but with those few notes he qualified as the musical genius of a hundred years. The only human who, in that time, had produced anything resembling music.

Entranced, he listened. When the last echo was lost he felt empty. He sat down on the stool and rubbed his cheek against the old instrument. His hands couldn't stay away from the keyboard.

**M**EANWHILE his mother strolled determinedly through Culture City. "I just love the synphony don't you, Danny?" For the first time she realized he wasn't with her. She looked around bewilderedly.

"Don't worry," said her companion. "He can't be far. Probably in the twentieth century sec-



tion watching the electric signs."

His mother laughed nervously. "Quaint, isn't it? Let's go. We have to find him." She angled to the left, thinking she saw him through the crowd. When she got there it was another little boy, not Danny at all.

However she had a bit of luck. The commercial artist on the street was temporarily vacant. She hesitated for a moment between her duty to find Danny at once and her desire to own a real work of art. The middle aged couple heading toward the booth decided her. Swiftly she inserted a coin.

"Yes?" said the deep gruff voice of the mechanism.

"I'd like two pictures," she said. "Subject matter?"

"One for a child's room. Danny Tocar, age 11. You have access to personality records."

"I do. But if you can give me some indication—"

"Oh something by Roualt. That should be harmless."

The robot artist noted that. "Daylight or night?"

"Something that glows in the dark," she said.

"And the other picture?"

She considered. "Something different," she said. "Maybe a combined Miro and Goya."

"The two styles aren't compatible," warned the commercial artist.

"Then make them compatible," she answered. "It's time the two were reconciled."

The commercial artist could not sigh. "Subject matter of the Miro-Goya picture?"

"A peaceful scene. Perhaps rockets to the moon."

"Goya never heard of rockets," began the artist. "And while there was talk of them during Miro's life—"

"Project them," she insisted reasonably. "Project their perceptions to the time of the first rocket to the moon. It's merely a matter of analysis." She gave her name and address. She wasn't going to argue with a robot.

A relay in the artist clicked and sent a routine request for apartment dimensions, color layout, furnishing arrangement. Simultaneously the picture requirements were integrated. For the boy it was easy. The elements of the original artist Roualt were reshuffled and the basic night glowing pigments were selected.

The Miro-Goya picture was harder. Trial and error were necessary. The results would not be happy; a schizoid painting was bound to ensue. It was the task of the commercial artist to see that the pictorial insanity was not too evident.

The middle aged couple stepped into the booth as Danny's mother

left. They ordered Grandma Moses and Norman Rockwell, sunny side up.

There was little reason for Danny's mother to be alarmed. An accident was improbable. Nevertheless she sent her companion in one direction while she took another route. Belatedly she thought of Music Hall.

It wasn't closed yet, though it would be soon. She stepped into the dim interior; a soft light illuminated the stage. And there was music, a kind she'd never heard. A child playing, as, a few hundred years before, countless children had played. A simple two fingered melody, but nevertheless a tune, distinct and recognizable.

"Danny," she called; but he didn't hear. She climbed to the stage though she had less luck with the door to the enclosure than her son had had.

"Danny." She pounded against it. Danny looked up, his smile of preoccupation fading. He came out.

"It's a piano," said Danny.

"I know it's a piano. And very valuable, the only one in the world. You might break it." She didn't know, but her statement wasn't true. There were seven others, carefully preserved and guarded.

"I've been careful," he said. "I don't want to break it."

"Listen, Danny. Would you go near an atomic pile?"

"No," he admitted.

"Of course not," she said. "Robots do that kind of work. They are built for it and it doesn't hurt them. It's like that with music."

Gravely he considered her logic. "But it's not the same. It didn't hurt me at all," he said. "It was fun playing. I wish I had a piano."

She took hold of him and led him away. "You must understand," she said in a voice that was firmer than her grip. "Men often listen to music. Only robots play it."

ON playday Danny went walking in Culture City. Elsewhere there were game robots and organized activity, but he didn't like being organized. There were times he didn't care for it at all.

He went past a night club, department store and beauty salon, twentieth century middle period. His interest was casual.

He first paused at a late twentieth century drugstore. He went inside and looked at the merchandise. He still wasn't interested, but it was best to pretend curiosity. *Shoplifting is a crime punishable by law.* What exactly was shoplifting? If it meant what it seemed to, there were giants in those days. He walked on, past the telephone booths at the back

of the store.

He was nearing his goal. Outside, at the extreme back, near the parking lot where ancient vehicles were still standing to complete the illusion of authenticity, he saw it.

The S. P. was bigger than a telephone booth and was decorated with odd green figures the intent of which was to project comfort and rest. There were larger and better S. P.'s, near his home, but Danny had a reason for coming here. It was one of the first models, but it did the same work that more modern ones did. It was slower, but Danny had time.

He looked around. Late afternoon, not many were in Culture City at this time of day. Certain that no one observed, he squeezed in the anteroom of the S. P. and closed the door.

He took coins from his pocket and inserted them, waiting for the mechanism to warm up.

"Name?" asked S. P. The voice had an old fashioned sound. A little too hearty and friendly.

"Danny."

"Danny what?"

"Just Danny."

The machine answered slowly. "You have the privilege of remaining anonymous. Please sit down."

Danny sat down.

"Identification."

This didn't seem anonymous to

Danny. Hesitantly he pressed his thumb against the fingerprint plate.

"That's satisfactory," said the machine. "The fingerprint is for my files. I'll not try to trace you."

Danny relaxed. The old machine was better for his purpose.

"Certain data is necessary before you can be admitted to the consulting chamber," said the S. P. "We'll keep it to a minimum. First your age?"

This was critical. "Nineteen," said Danny readily.

"That's young," said the machine thoughtfully. "You're aware that persons under eighteen can't be treated?"

He was aware. That's why he'd come to this machine. Presumably it was less efficient than newer models, particularly in the detection circuits.

"You're still very young," continued the S. P. "My advice is to seek help from your parents. If you don't want to do that, there's a free public counselling service."

Danny waited.

"Then I will take you," said the machine. "As a sidewalk psychiatrist, I have no choice. However, in view of your stated age I'll have to check your mentality."

The newer models of sidewalk psychiatrists did that automatically. Under the direction of the

machine Danny placed a clumsy device over his head. He concentrated on thinking slowly and clearly. Above all, clearly. The machine could not read his thoughts, but it could get an encephalocurve which could be compared to standard ones.

In time the sidewalk psychiatrist instructed him to remove the device. "At least nineteen mentally," it announced. "Sometimes higher, much higher. In other areas actually childish in configuration. Perhaps that's why you need help."

"Maybe," said Danny.

"You may enter the consulting chamber. Deposit the amount indicated at the door."

**H**ALF of Danny's weekly allowance vanished in the coin slot. He went in and lay down on the pneumatic couch. The voice was even friendlier than it had been. He should have been reassured but wasn't.

"Now, Danny. What's your problem?"

He had carried it around with him for months. Once or twice he had tried to talk to others about it. And promptly shut up when he had seen where it was leading. He stirred restlessly. "Music," he mumbled.

"You should learn to like it," said the machine. "It's essential

for a man of culture."

"But I do like it," cried Danny. He remembered and lowered his voice. "I like music," he whispered.

"Then there's no problem. Listen to it and enjoy it."

"But I do listen. Every chance I get."

"Be more moderate," said the sidewalk psychiatrist. "Don't listen so much or soon there'll be nothing you haven't heard."

"I want to be a musician," said Danny.

"A good hobby for a spaceman," said the sidewalk psychiatrist approvingly.

"It's not a hobby," said Danny. "And I don't want to be a spaceman."

"Not a spacemen?" The sidewalk psychiatrist seemed surprised. "Mars and Venus are settled. Last year a permanent colony was set up on Pluto. And a few months ago a ship set out for the stars. Spacemen have a glorious future."

"I know it," said Danny. "But does everyone have to be a spaceman?"

"No. Electronics is a good field. And then there's math."

"I'm good in both of them," said Danny impatiently. "If I should tell you what I've done—" He stopped. It wouldn't do to tell; that would reveal he wasn't nine-

teen. "But I don't want to be any of those. Isn't there room somewhere for a musician?"

"You think other things are important. So, Danny?" The machine paused. "You're right. There are stars inside that have to be reached." The sidewalk psychiatrist pondered. "Then be what you want, Danny. Study and listen. Maybe when you've heard everything there is, you'll wish you hadn't. But you will be an authority."

"I don't want to be an authority," yelled Danny. He didn't lower his voice. "I want to be a musician."

The machine seemed to be lost. "You mean you want to play an instrument?"

"That's it. Also, if I'm good enough, to compose music."

"Compose?" said the machine. "Play? There's no way to do that. Even if you could find an instrument, robots can play it better."

"Robots can't play at all," said Danny. "They're machines. They merely repeat the notes that men played long ago. And when they do it—" He stopped. He wanted information, not an argument.

He controlled his voice and spoke more slowly. "This is a hypothetical question. How would I, or anyone, learn to be a musician?"

"Don't ask that question."

"But I did," said Danny. "It's not against the law."

"But against custom," answered the S.P. "And that's stronger than you think. It's the matrix out of which laws are formed."

"I've paid you," said Danny. "Answer my question."

The machine spoke with difficulty. "First, secretly you must find—" The voice broke off, and though Danny shouted, it would not answer.

A light flashed on the panel. PLEASE REMAIN WHERE YOU ARE. THE PSYCH SQUAD WILL SOON BE HERE. DON'T ATTEMPT VIOLENCE; IT WILL BE MET WITH FORCE IF NECESSARY. YOU HAVE INDICATED YOU ARE AN ABNORMAL MEMBER OF SOCIETY.

PADDED arms swung from beneath the couch to enfold him, but he avoided the clumsy efforts. He sprang to the door. It was locked. He shook it, but it wasn't easily forced. He searched his pockets. Nothing to help him. Next time he wouldn't come unprepared.

Soft music crept into the narrow chamber. It was meant to be soothing; under the circumstances it wasn't. Danny pounded wildly at the door. The hinges gave a little, but not enough.

He looked frantically for something loose that could be used as a weapon. If he had tools he might detach the still waving arms of the couch and use one of them to beat his way through the door. But he had no tools. He pressed his nose longingly against the armor glass.

He got the first glimpse of the psych squad. Two were robots, large and evidently strong. They were pleasant enough to look at and gave an impression of gentleness. Whether their behavior matched their appearance was another matter. The third member of the squad was a man.

The group approached cautiously. Danny squatted low beside the door. "I'm in contact with the psych squad," said the S. P. "If you'll cooperate with them it will look good on your record. You'll get by with a minimum mental change. They may let you keep some of your enthusiasm for music. Will you go peacefully?"

"Yes," said Danny in a low voice.

"Then go out slowly when they open the door. Hold your hands above your head."

"I can't," said Danny. "I hurt myself. I think it's my leg."

S. P. was silent for a moment. "The robots will come for you. Remember, don't try to harm them. They're built to handle vio-

lent cases."

Danny faked a cry of pain. He peered through a crack in the door. It was getting dark, difficult to see the legs of the approaching robot.

The door opened and Danny was through it like a sprinter. The robot reached out; it just wasn't fast enough. It was experienced, but not in capturing a boy trained in spaceman gymnastics. Intact, Danny wriggled free. Not a shred of skin or clothing remained in the grasping hands.

He eluded the second robot and changed direction. Deliberately he collided with the man. Of the two Danny was smaller, but not by much. Besides youth, he had the advantage of momentum. Startled, the man went down. By the time he scrambled to his feet, mad enough to follow, Danny had entered a genuine twentieth century alley, complete with trash cans. Danny was certain the man hadn't seen his face.

He had visited Culture City often and was at home in it. It was a good gamble the psych squad wasn't. Danny ran on, dodging through the narrow passageways, and, when he was well ahead of them, climbed an inconspicuous fire escape to the top of a building and watched the psych squad blunder by below.

Satisfied he hadn't been observed, he went inside the build-

ing and presently emerged on a main street, breathing a little heavily, but otherwise a normal boy, face washed and hair combed.

Culture City was beginning to come to life with the evening trade. More people were on the streets and he mingled with them. But he knew his escape was only temporary, unless . . .

HE bought a confection and munched on it though his stomach quivered and refused to have anything to do with the intruding material. He had to act natural, and something like that seemed called for. He picked up a stick from the trash that, true to the period, littered the streets. He swung it nonchalantly as he circled back to the drugstore. He passed through that as fast as he dared.

Into the parking lot again. He searched along the borders of it until he found what he wanted. Then he approached the sidewalk psychiatrist. "It's me, Danny," he said in a low voice.

The S. P. seemed surprised. "What do you want?"

"I'm going to give myself up," he said. "You've got my fingerprints."

"I do," said S. P. "And you remembered that in your panic. You have an uncluttered mind. Too bad it isn't well balanced.

Wait. I'll call the psych squad."

"Let me inside," said Danny. His voice broke.

"Nonsense," said S. P. "The psych squad won't hurt you." Nevertheless the reply was uncertain.

"Please let me wait inside," begged Danny.

"You may have a weapon," said S. P. slowly. "I can't take a chance."

That told Danny what he wanted to know. The fingerprints had not yet been transmitted back to central files. "I'm twelve years old," he said. "You thought I was older because I'm smart and because I'm big for my age. But I'm really twelve years old and I'm afraid of them."

The sidewalk psychiatrist searched through its memory and evaluated it. "You're right about your age. And the fear is understandable." The voice softened. "Come inside and wait. And be quiet. I have to concentrate to contact the psych squad robots."

The door swung open and Danny thrust the stick in the hinges. The door started to close again but couldn't. "What are you doing?" asked the startled sidewalk psychiatrist. The rock in Danny's hand crashed against the panel that housed the thinking mechanism. "Please," shrieked S. P. The rock smashed again and the voice was silent.

Danny thrust his hand into the tangled mass and felt around. He withdrew his hand and pocketed a small item. After that he worked fast, carefully wiping off everything he had touched.

Satisfied that he had done everything he could, he wrenched the stick out of the hinges and jumped outside as the door slammed shut. He walked out of the parking lot and through Culture City to the park that encircled and isolated it from the surrounding great spaceport.

He sat down in the darkness and took the small mechanism from his pocket. The memory unit of the sidewalk psychiatrist. The record of the interview, his fingerprints, all the pertinent data.

Without this the psych squad wouldn't have a thing to work on. A brief glimpse in the darkness. And Danny was big for his age. A twelve year old psych case? They wouldn't think of it.

Danny laid the mechanism on the ground and stamped on it dispassionately. When the destruction was complete he scooped up the remains and tossed the useless unit into a small stream that gurgled nearby.

His knees were weak. He buried his face in the grass and let sobs shake him until there were no tears. He smoothed his hair and wiped his face and got up.

The way was not exactly clear, but he knew he was going to reach it. He would have to do it alone.

THERE was always a chance a passerby might look into the entrance and see him. Danny worked according to plan. He adjusted the ultraviolet cell, fanning it out to a thin vertical beam of the proper height. He sat it on the floor and aimed it at the dark stripe that looked like a decoration but wasn't. It was a photo electric eye, continuous from floor to ceiling. It was also, Danny knew, a minimum intensity circuit. And that made it easier.

Danny walked through the circuit, behind the cell he had set on the floor. The alarm didn't ring. It wouldn't, as long as the eye received an unbroken beam from any source. In the ultraviolet cell he had provided such a source.

He reached back and drew the cell toward him, carefully pointing it at the dark stripe on the wall until his hand was safely through. He snapped off the cell and hurried around the corner. He was beyond chance human detection.

He went on. There was a door, locked, as he expected. An old fashioned lock, mechanical type, in keeping with the character of Music Hall. It had been a good lock when it was made, nearly unpickable. Danny inserted a wire



device and listened. He turned, and the door swung open.

He stepped back a few feet in the darkness, ran, and jumped forward. The lights did not go on. He had jumped far enough. It was merely a pressure plate, designed to count visitors. But one visitor would activate the auditorium staff. And that he didn't want.

He closed the door behind him and made his way into the balcony by way of a rest room. From the balcony he climbed into a box. From there a little used passage-way led to the stage.

It was easy, ridiculously so. The piano was lighted by a soft violet light, probably germicidal. Danny paused at the entrance to the enclosure.

It was useless to struggle against the hand, that, from nowhere, fastened to his arm. He was no match for the strength of a robot.

"I knew there was something wrong," said the caretaker. The face that looked at Danny was dignified and kindly, if expressionless.

Danny said nothing.

"Humidity changes," muttered the robot caretaker. "Not much, but some on three successive days. No one is supposed to be here. Can't have it. Wood will rot and metal rust." It seemed vaguely disturbed.

Danny squirmed. The caretaker

took hold of both arms and looked closer. "Why it's human." It squeezed harder as if to test.

Tears came to Danny's eyes. "I belong here," he said stubbornly.

"During a synphony," conceded the robot. "Then it's all right for you to be here, in the audience. Other times you must stay out. Away from the piano."

"But I belong here," said Danny. "Honest. I'm a composer."

"Recomposer," corrected the caretaker. "Robots don't compose. They recompose."

"I can recompose too," said Danny desperately. "I'm going to be a real musician."

"Recompose," mused the caretaker. The grip loosened a little. "Then you're a music robot. I never heard of a robot composer, though." The caretaker thought about it with all the mental equipment it had. "If you're a music robot, let's hear some music."

"Let go," said Danny. "I'll play the piano."

"First the music," said the caretaker. "Then I'll let go."

"But I don't have an instrument."

"Music robots don't need them. The notes are stored inside. They carry an instrument for appearance only."

"The piano master needs an instrument," argued Danny. "It's

different. It actually plays."

"The piano robot, yes," agreed the caretaker. "But there's only one in the city and you're not it." The caretaker sighed. "You've been lying to me. I'll have to report you."

Danny struggled, though it was useless. In a few minutes he'd be turned over to the authorities. Psychological conditioning would be used on him. He had to avoid that, no matter what.

He stopped struggling; deliberately he relaxed—and whistled.

It was thin and halting, but the caretaker hesitated. Danny's breath came a little easier and the melody became stronger. The caretaker paused doubtfully.

Danny swept into a currently popular recomposition. The caretaker let go.

Triumphantly Danny whistled on. He followed with a new tune he made up as he went along.

The caretaker sighed when Danny finished. "Then you really are a music robot."

"What else? Did you ever hear any human make music?"

The caretaker shook his head and walked to the piano. "But why didn't they tell me you're supposed to play here?"

"Do they tell you anything about music? You're just the caretaker, you know."

A spark of suspicion remained.

"Why do you need to practice? Other robots don't."

"They're made the way they are," said Danny. "They never get any worse, or better. But composers are different. We have lots to learn."

The caretaker was satisfied. "All right. Play it, then." It adjusted the humidity controls in the piano enclosure to compensate for the increased moisture.

"Can't," said Danny, conscious of time. "Tomorrow, maybe."

"Tonight, if you want," suggested the caretaker.

"Tonight will suit me fine," said Danny.

**D**URING the years that followed Danny practiced and played for his own enjoyment. He did well in his conventional studies; that was a matter of camouflage. Not so well, though, that he'd be selected for specialization. That called for more real knowledge than he dared show. He had to be a step ahead so that he could estimate what he was supposed to know and then fit himself into the academic specifications.

As he grew older his free time increased. He spent as much of it as he could at Music Hall. Mornings, evenings, but mostly at night he practiced. Even by the old forgotten standards he became an excellent musician. It was a

precarious existence; his mastery was sharpened by the knowledge that he must never be discovered.

During the year he was fourteen he attended a synphony; nothing unusual in it, a routine matter. He sat in the balcony where he was less conspicuous. The lights lowered and the conversation in Music Hall slackened.

On the stage came the Louis Armstrong Hot Five. Satchmo to the life, all of them, from the first to the last recorded note. Two trumpets, a cornet, and two singers.

A trumpet soared out on a clean strong singing note and the other trumpet danced above it with a clarinet effect. Satchmo again, this time on the cornet, created a staccato growl in the lower register. And Louis the singer, with uncanny rhythm and knowledge of vocal dynamics, started the song. The fifth Armstrong backed the ensemble with an obligato of scat. The Hot Five took it from there.

It was on exhibition of free style counterpoint and melody that had once been a part of traditional music. Lost for a time, found again by jazz, heatedly denied and equally defended, it had at last returned to its rightful place in the great company of music.

Louis, the original Louis, would have been amazed by the per-

formance. Delighted by it, too. Because it was his, from beginning to end. Every note, at one time or another, he had played, though not in that sequence. He might have done it that way, had he, in the flesh, been able to split himself into five parts, each as musically complete as the others.

The Caruso quartet followed. Danny listened as raptly as he had to the first. Different music in each case, but melody was big enough to include both performers.

During intermission a girl twice his age attached herself to Danny. She wouldn't have bothered had she known, but he was still big for his age. It was easy to mistake physical size for maturity, youthful silence for sophisticated taciturnity.

She chattered gaily. "Don't you think it's wonderful?"

He nodded mutely.

"I mean, the world's great masters, all the time. Nothing second rate. The best, any time you want them, of all the ages."

"Not all the ages," he corrected. "What about Paganini?"

"What about him?" she said. "Who's he?"

He reconsidered swiftly. She wouldn't know about Paganini since he had played before recorded music. "Some old virtuoso," he said offhandedly. "I read about

him. He was supposed to be good."

"But as long as we haven't heard him we can't miss him," she said cheerfully.

It was too pat. "Not only that," he said. "You said masters of all ages. What about the masters of today? Have you heard them? Where are they?"

"Why here," she said puzzledly. "At any synthyony."

"They're not," he said positively. "We're living with borrowed music. Those composers knew nothing of the things that are familiar to us. They never heard rockets coming in from Mars. Nor the hum of hundred story farms. How could they compose the music that we need to hear?"

The girl looked at him queerly, as if seeing him for the first time. "You're very young," she said finally. "Most of us feel that way when we're young." She touched him lightly. "You may be right, but keep your views to yourself." She made her way back to the auditorium.

Fortunately the synthyony had begun. The audience had left the lobby; none but the girl had heard him. Danny had said it, though, and having done so, couldn't listen to the music. Casals, Menuhin, Heifetz, Sidney Bechet, Szigetti, Segovia, and others were in the orchestra, but the harmonies were meaningless and the melody, or

rather the fusion of a dozen older ones, was thin and hackneyed.

The only composer of the twenty-third century sat in the body of a fourteen year old boy and had nothing to compose on or for.

HE went home, confused. What he had said was true, though this was the first time he had recognized it. For several days he did not practice. In the end he went back to the piano and played more fiercely.

Much of his time he now spent in the experimental lab. He puttered with sound and electronics in a seemingly aimless fashion. Outwardly nothing came of this; in six months his interest waned. But in that period he had built, secretly, a small device.

It was not altogether new; it was a combination of several existing sound systems, adapted to his purpose. But the application of the device, that was new.

It did not exist by and for itself; it was a supplement to an existing musical instrument, the piano. It changed the range of the familiar instrument, extended it, developed it.

Danny concealed the electronic device in his room. Piece by piece he took it to the Music Hall and installed it in the piano. When he finished, to all outward appearances, the piano was unchanged.

Hidden in the legs, concealed in the lid, disposed of in various places, his attachment was safe from all but x ray inspection. And on such a time honored instrument that kind of an examination wasn't likely.

The switch had posed a problem. It couldn't be a mechanical type; that was too difficult to hide. And even the best hidden switch might accidentally be turned on.

A sonic switch was the answer. A complete melody which, when played through, would actuate his invention. The new sound system would then be coupled to the old piano and a twenty-third century instrument would be in operation. A piano, but more than the piano, beyond it. To himself Danny called it a meta piano.

The requirements of the actuating melody, the key that would operate the sonic switch, were simple. It had to be a melody that was never played. Something that had never been recorded in pre-music robot days, or one of which no record had survived.

Danny could read music, an accomplishment he'd taught himself. He visualized a printed score he had once seen in a museum. He ran over it once in his mind and he played it on the piano. The blank tape that was a part of sounds were impressed on the

his device.

The melody was keyed in; thereafter, when it was played once, his invention would be ready for operation. A time lapse would switch it off.

Danny arose and walked out of the enclosure. His work as an inventor was done. His accomplishments as a musician were just beginning.

THE next two years Danny learned the instrument. Each time he switched it on with the key melody, playing until it was time to go, and then leaving, secure in his knowledge that the passage of time would disconnect his invention. He grew more assured of his technique, expanding and developing it. He had been good before. How much he now knew there was no way of gauging. He had no audience whose reaction he could test.

Of course there were the usual evening concerts. One night he sat in the balcony listening aimlessly. He let conversations flow past without actually hearing them. Background noise, an essential part of the scene at Music Hall.

Without knowing why, he became disturbed. Something was happening. He listened more closely. Several times he heard it mentioned. And no one but himself ought to know that.

For the first time he glanced at the program he'd taken on entering. He read through it with profound unease.

"Tonight's audience will participate in the most exciting musical event of the past generation. A new record has been found. The robot piano master, Horowitz Rubinstein Paderewsky Art Tatum Rozenthal will have a new technique added. Jelly Roll Morton will be integrated into the composite musical personality.

"The record was found several months ago during the excavation of a twentieth century slum. Shattered into several hundred pieces, at first it was not recognized. A keen student of music investigated, and, as a result of modern research was able to restore it to the original condition.

"Transposed to the brain of the robot master, the work is presented tonight for the first time in several centuries. *Flee As A Bird To The Mountain . . .*"

Danny laid the program down. A prophetic title. Advice that he ought to take, if he could. *Flee As A Bird . . .* That was the key melody; it would bring in operation his invention, the meta piano.

Automatically he arose. Not to leave; he couldn't do that. Once the meta piano was played it would never be accessible. After

that they would guard it well, perhaps with a corps of robots. Moreover they would discover the source of the new sounds. They would trace the parts of the mechanism back to him. They wouldn't be lenient when they found him.

He had perhaps an hour in which to make certain the meta piano was not played.

He headed toward the box seats. He had to approach the piano from backstage. It might be possible to cut the lights, and in the few minutes of darkness wreck the concealed meta piano circuits. The piano wouldn't be harmed; it would play as it always had.

For the first time in his memory all the boxes were filled. A husky, belligerent man glared at him. "I'm sorry," said Danny, "But—"

"Sure, I know," said the occupant. "You want a better seat." He turned away and began chatting with the girls at his side.

Danny shrugged. That was no way to get backstage. He went downstairs. Normally open, tonight the stage entrance was closed. Actually the audience wasn't interested in the performers, but tradition lived long and there was a press of spectators bent on conforming to it.

Fifty minutes left and he still wasn't near the piano. He fought his way outside and strolled speculatively along the building. The

power lines were underground, of course. And most likely there were several alternative sources of power. Nothing he could do about that.

On impulse he walked to the back of the building and whistled. The caretaker opened the door and peered out cautiously. "Can't practice tonight."

"After the crowd goes home I can," said Danny. He walked in. Forty minutes remained.

THE audience had been all confusion. Backstage it was quiet. Robots were efficient and silent. Tonight, however, a human announcer and one technician were present. It was a complicating factor he hadn't counted on.

The power switches were hard to find. After several fruitless minutes, dodging in and out of the corridors to avoid the human crew, Danny sought out the caretaker.

"Where is the switchboard?" he asked casually.

"Thought you were a music robot," said the caretaker slowly.

"I am," said Danny hastily. He whistled.

The caretaker closed his eyes. "You're not supposed to know about such things." The eyes remained closed. "Anyway, the switches are below. Atom bomb shelter built hundreds of years ago and never used." The eyes

came open. "Know anything about atom bombs?"

"Not a thing," said Danny and walked away. He knew about atom bombs but he didn't have one. And short of that there was no way to interrupt the power.

Twenty-five minutes left, and it seemed impossible to get to the meta piano circuits.

The robot piano master was his last hope. Disable it and the critical part of the program would have to be cancelled.

Danny started the search. The music robots, motionless and silent, were seated near the orchestra entrance. The piano robot was not with them.

Acting on a hunch, Danny located the dressing rooms. One by one he went through them. A robot had no need for privacy, but in the third room he found the piano robot. It was listening to music. Vaguely he was disturbed. Generally robots merely reproduced music; they didn't listen to it. Evidently the piano robot was different in ways he hadn't suspected. He'd have to find out about that, later.

He located a short length of metal bar and softly opened the door. The piano robot was still intently listening. A blow from behind knocked it sprawling. Instantly Danny followed with another blow to the side of the head.

The robot jerked spasmodically.

Methodically he pounded the hands and arms into a pulpy mass. It wasn't flesh and it didn't look like it; through the synthetic skin covering wires and metal joints splayed as he struck savagely.

"Piano master." Danny straightened up. The human announcer was outside the door.

Danny looked around. There was no other exit save the way he had come in. He turned the music louder. The meta piano was not safe unless he could get out undetected. They would want to know the reasons for his attack on the piano robot and they had means to find out.

"Piano Master." The voice was louder, more insistent.

"Yes?" Danny muffled his voice, spoke through the music.

"The program will begin in ten minutes."

"I know. I'll be there."

"The music committee is waiting to accompany you. When will you be ready?"

He was caught by the logic of the occasion. Normally no one bothered with the piano robot. But this was a big event and old traditions had been resurrected for it. "I'm listening to the music," said Danny. "I'll be ready."

HE stripped clothing off the inert robot. Forked black coat

and a ridiculous string around his throat: the uniform of the music robot. The existence of such a uniform would help him. Hastily he changed, tossing his own clothing in a corner. He was half a head taller than the piano master, and broader in the shoulders. The sleeves and trousers were too short. He stretched them to fit. Another inch more would have been more than the fabric would lengthen.

Danny's hair was light brown; the robot piano master's an iron grey. Under stage lighting it might not be noticed. He ruffled his hair to conform to standards.

Did anyone look at a robot's face? Danny hoped not; there was nothing he could do about his. He dragged the robot behind a chair, and, assuming a masklike, tranquil expression, walked out of the dressing room as if in a trance.

No one noticed anything. Nodding, the announcer led him to the stage. The committee followed and sat at one side of the stage. So far Danny had passed.

He had read the program and knew what was to occur. An introductory piano concerto and then the event of the evening. Or perhaps the decade. It rated a human announcer and was probably broadcast to three worlds.

The important thing was the sequence of notes in *Flee As A Bird*. It it were played exactly as



he had keyed it in, the meta piano would go into operation. Once they heard it the audience would never mistake it for any other instrument.

But the sequence was long. If he could alter it by as little as two notes the sonic switch would not operate. It was worth trying.

Outside the enclosure the announcer was making a speech. The audience applauded and then it was his cue.

He smiled ironically. He had never hoped for an audience, and now he had one. It was a debut he didn't care for.

He struck the opening bars of the concerto. The keys rippled under his fingers. He played with the uninspired competence that was expected of a music robot.

It was time for the trumpets to come in, but they didn't. And the violins were long overdue with a repeat of his opening phrase. The orchestra was supposed to play with the piano and it wasn't doing so. Danny looked at the audience; something was wrong; even they knew it. What was it? Danny glanced over his shoulder at the orchestra.

The robots stood there uneasily, dummy instruments poised. Not a sound came from the mechanism concealed in their bodies. For some reason they could not follow his lead.

He let a note drop from his fingers and stared around. It wasn't going the way he had planned. The announcer stepped into the gap.

"Due to an unexpected technical failure, we are unable to present the concerto as scheduled. There will be a brief delay and then the main event of the evening will follow."

Ad libbing, of course. The announcer didn't know what had happened. But he had observed that Danny was playing and the orchestra was not. It would seem logical to him that the fault lay in the orchestra and not with the piano.

Actually, Danny now realized, it was the reverse. The piano robot was the leader of the orchestra. It *was* different; it coordinated the activities of the other robots, gave them the rhythm, a purpose. Better musician or not, Danny couldn't fill that role. He was a man, not a machine, and his mind did not function on an electronic level.

Danny glanced at the wings of the stage. No matter what he did now he was lost. The robot piano master stood out of sight of the audience and the announcer, broken arms drooping. Beside him were half a dozen members of the psych squad.

The audience was restless, and

puzzled. As full as the auditorium was, there was room for a few more men who slipped in quietly and took their stations by the exits. They were probably armed.

DANNY faced the piano. They had come to hear an old melody, and he would give it to them. *Flee As A Bird To The Mountain*. It was a New Orleans funeral march, and that was fitting. It was the end of him as a musician.

He let the first notes roll off his fingers, slow. The music had been buried three hundred years and it was still good. It hadn't been worn out with too much listening.

He got through the first chorus and the audience was listening. They didn't know it, but it was human music they were responding to.

The sonic switch closed and the meta piano took over. Danny had built it and it was to the piano as the piano was to a harpsichord. It was a solitary instrument but an orchestra couldn't compete with it. The sounding board of the original piano was not big enough. It was designed to use the whole building and the air within it as the vibrating medium. He had never used the full force of it before. But he did now. Now was the time; he had nothing to lose.

He finished the New Orleans march on the meta piano and then let them hear what music meant to him. His own compositions, carried around in his memory because it was dangerous to let anyone know he could write music. It was his audience and he was going to show them what previously he had concealed. The technicians wouldn't have enough presence of mind to cut him off the radio hookup.

He played them harmonies no one ever thought of; not only what they heard, but also what they couldn't hear. Overtones piled high on overtones until the last in the series were out of reach of the human ear. Maybe the ears of dogs or bats too, but that didn't matter. It didn't matter either that humans couldn't hear it. It was there and it affected them.

It touched the auditory nerve endings and those nerves that had nothing to do with the perception of sound. It moved with the hush of a comet or shook like an exploding nucleus disrupts an atom. From the big to the little and back again he took them on a musical tour of the universe. No other charge than the price of admission.

It was his first concert and probably his last. When it was over he leaned against the meta piano; it became silent and changed

back into the ordinary instrument.

The audience did not move and made no sound. He had expected some reaction, but not this. He had hoped they would like it.

He bowed his head in defeat. When he looked up the audience still had not moved. But the piano master stood at the entrance to the enclosure. "These can be replaced," the robot whispered, holding out his broken hands.

Then the piano master spoke loud enough for everyone to hear. "I don't know anything about music. Will you teach me?"

That was the signal the audience was waiting for; the applause came in waves that would not stop. It engulfed Danny and brought him trembling to his feet.

The thunder of sound increased in intensity until it seemed as if the very walls would crash with the vibration. And mingled with it he heard a swelling chorus of human voices shouting a word long buried but now resurrected; Bravo! Bravo—*Bravo!*

A smile crossed Danny's tense features and suddenly then he felt relaxed; he glanced to the side of the stage, saw the piano robot nodding approval, and beside the robot, the psych squad. The faces had lost their sternness; there was an awe instead, and, Danny saw, smiles . . .

Danny turned back to the audience and its continuing ovation.

He bowed humbly . . .

THE END



"I say, Spencer, do you hear anything?"

# TEST PROBLEM

*By*

*Alan J. Ramm*



**Jeremy knew he was in danger of flunking his final course and that meant a washout. But he sat down before the panel and concentrated. The problem was one of mind over matter — three parsecs of space away!**

**W**HEN he came to the head of the examination corridor, Jeremy glanced briefly at the slip of paper in his hand. Room 16B. He strode unhesitatingly down the long hall; his long legs carrying him along swiftly. After six years at the University, he knew the exact location of the tiny testing cubicle which had been assigned to him for his final exam in Advanced Deliberation And Memory.

He hesitated a moment before the door of 16B, shook his head as if in defiance, then entered the room. He was in for a tough

time and he knew it. The classes he had cut were sure to affect his chances of passing the test and he needed the course credits for graduation.

Taking the course record card from his pocket, he slipped it into the machine that would automatically record his mark at the close of the test.

Then he settled his long frame into the seat placed conveniently in front of the panels of dials and the computing machines which filled one entire side of the room. Checking to make sure that everything he might need was in place,

he reached out and snapped the switch marked — INSTRUCTIONS.

"You are ready, Student Hohvah?" The voice came gently from a hidden loudspeaker.

"Yes, Instructor."

"Then listen to your orders. You have been allotted sector 2645 of space in parsec three.

"In the next ten minutes we shall transmit a detailed study of a star system to you. Using only the raw materials of space and the mental techniques taught you in your studies, you will reproduce a reasonable facsimile of the system in the space sector you have been assigned. Have you any questions?"

"How complete a facsimile must it be, Instructor?"

"It must be reasonably correct as to physical makeup. All life forms must also be reproduced."

"I am ready."

For the next ten minutes he sat tensed in his chair as the impulses from the psychoscope washed through his mind and body. He gradually absorbed a three dimensional mental picture of the system he was to reproduce. When the image faded, he relaxed a moment, then laid his fingers on the keyboard and went to work.

Gradually his confidence grew. Under the direction of his flashing fingers, the energy machines

created a warp in the space of his sector. At exactly the correct moment he adjusted the wavelength of his Thought Augmentor until it matched the thought matrix of his own mind. The full impact of his tremendous mental abilities jolted into the space warp. And as the sweat of concentration gathered on his forehead, he hopefully watched the viewing screen on one of the panels before him. At first there was only a mere flicker in the center of the warp. Then swiftly, so swiftly that he barely had time to lower his eyes protectively, the entire screen flared into the light of raw uncontained energy.

Once more Jeremy's fingers worked feverishly and constricting force beams slowly brought the chaos under control. At last there gleamed on his screen the steady glare of a hot new sun.

Now that he had the sun material to draw upon, he easily reconstructed the entire system he had been assigned. By setting up stresses and strains within the star he caused huge chunks to spin off and take up orbits about it.

THE problem so engrossed him that he scarcely noticed the passage of time. Periodically he would get hungry or thirsty. It was a simple matter to press the

proper buttons and hurriedly gulp the foods that appeared. Whenever he tired mentally, he tilted his chair to a comfortable position and slept.

And as the days passed, the facsimile took shape under his genius. Each separate world became a duplicate of its original. Mountains were born; the seas dashed at first against shores that were bare and bleak; then the magic of plant life on all the varied worlds assumed a rainbow of colors. The ooze of the oceans began to crawl. On land and in the air animals appeared.

At last, through fatigue-rimmed eyes, he looked at what he had created and it was good. With a smile on his lips he relaxed. Although he reached out to cut off the power to his Thought Augmentor, he didn't quite reach the switch before he fell into a restless sleep. He tossed and turned, twitched and dreamed.

When he awoke, he noticed that the power was still on. He quickly turned it off. A hurried, searching glance at the screen assured him. The facsimile was still good. Then he pressed the switch marked—INSTRUCTIONS.

"You are finished, Student Hovah?"

"Yes, Instructor!"

"It took you a long time—six whole days."

"Indeed? But it was a complicated problem."

"That is true. Wait while we examine your work."

The next few moments seemed as long as the whole exam time had.

Suddenly a gasp burst from the loudspeaker. "What is this? There is no creature such as this on any of the original worlds assigned to you. Explain please."

Jeremy tuned in on the thought and sight wave of the Instructor. Before him was a creature that he could not remember creating.

"You remember this creature, Student Hovah?"

"No, Instructor."

"But it must be yours. The entire facsimile is tuned to your wavelength. We have checked. Only you could have brought it into being; only you can destroy it. You know it is against the rules to increase the number of species in Creation. Destroy it!"

Jeremy looked at the creature so comfortably asleep against a tree and he felt pity and compassion and love for it.

"I cannot, Instructor. I do not know how it got there, unless it is a product of my dreams. Once I forgot to shut off the power while I slept."

"Sheer negligence! Destroy it, I say!"

"No it belongs there now. And

it looks lonely." Without warning he snapped on his Augmentor and before the Instructor could interfere, there appeared on the grass beside the creature another of the same species.

"Now you've done it," the Instructor screamed. "It can reproduce its kind." His voice grew coldly stern. "You have created an unreasonable facsimile. You

know what that means."

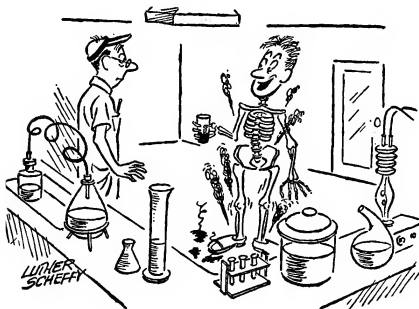
Mutely Jeremy got up from his chair. Automatically he reached for his course record card in Advanced Deliberation And Memory. To save space on it all courses were listed by the first letters of the course name. A glance verified the Instructor's verdict:

J. Hovah

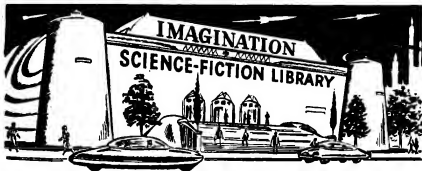
Failed in ADAM.

### THE END

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"It still burns a little going down, but  
we're on the right track."



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

*Conducted by Mark Reinsberg*

**Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review selected books as a guide to your recommended reading list.**

**RING AROUND THE SUN**

*by Clifford D. Simak.. 242 pages, 2.75. Simon & Schuster, New York, N. Y.*

A second Earth, where men can start anew as pioneers in pristine, uninhabited territory free from the accumulated mistakes of the present world, is the root of the mystery in Jay Vickers' personal life. Vickers learns eventually that he's able to bridge the time-gap between the two worlds when entranced by a spinning toy top—with which he associates childhood happiness.

The conflict in the story is between mutants who seek to encourage a mass exodus through covertly wrecking Earth's economy, and

the industrial leaders of Earth who very wickedly oppose them. Simak points an accusing finger at mechanical culture, yet the pastoral utopia into which refugees are delivered is itself a complex, centralized technology, even down to robot teachers for children. There is something not only paternalistic but coldly doctrinaire in the way the mutants manage their back-to-the-land movement.

Not good enough to recommend, not poor enough to condemn, Simak's latest novel is a muddled escapism, weak on characters and wavering in perception, that will disappoint the many readers who admired his "City."



## YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS

*Edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. 315 pages, \$3.50. Frederick Fell, New York, N. Y.*

Still struggling to justify their idea from an aesthetic point of view, though already successful with it in the market place, Bleiler and Dikty have selected five more novelettes from the previous year's science-fiction crop. While not free of second-rate material, their anthology is a considerable improvement over the first in the series and contains two of the most impressive bits of imaginative writing in a decade or more.

"Surface Tension" by James Blish is a great philosophical romance, the inspiring story of a hu-

man triumph over primeval environment, when a colonizing space ship crashes into a water world in an obscure quarter of the universe. "Conditionally Human" by Walter M. Miller is shockingly powerful in its description of a future era when genetic control forbids most humans to bear children but allows them pseudo-childbirth and talking pets.

"Firewater" by William Tenn is also a good story concerned with the role of the businessman in the future, but the conclusion is rather nebulous. The remaining two novelettes by Boyd Ellanby and Murray Leinster fall below the authors' usually high standards.

## ONCE UPON A STAR

*by Kendell Foster Crossen. 237 pages, \$2.95. Henry Holt, New York, N. Y.*

Fans who don't take their science-fiction too seriously will find this first s-f novel by mystery-writer Crossen rather entertaining. The publishers bill it as "a spoof at the whole science fiction school of writing." In that spirit, the reader can enjoy the intergalactic situation-comedy and farcical scientific erudition without becoming identified with the characters or bothering about probability.

The hero, Manning Draco, is an insurance investigator (reminiscent of a radio sleuth) who hops about from planet to planet checking the claims of native policyholders. His job is to squirm out of legally justified but ruinous payoffs on behalf of Greater Solarian Insurance,

Monopolated. Behind each such crisis is that star free-lance salesman and swindler from Rigel IV, Dzanku Dzanku. Needless to say, the investigator gets involved with sundry otherworld women in the course of his travels—ultimately with the boss's daughter.

The author's treatment is somewhat similar to the "Viagens" series of L. Sprague de Camp, coinciding even in the name of a character (Crossen's villainous Kramu Korshay parallels de Camp's swindler Darius Koshay). The chief criticism of Crossen's book, in fact, is its lack of originality. So many puns and gags which must have sounded uproarious to the author are painfully old in the s-f field. He greatly overdoes the interplanetary sex angle, acting as though he were its discoverer.



*Conducted by Mari Wolf*

I RECENTLY attended the Sixth Annual Westercon, the West Coast's regional science fiction conference. This year the Westercon was in Los Angeles, sponsored by LASFS, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society.

Like a much smaller scale model of the national Conventions the Westercons move from city to city on the Pacific Coast each year.

A Westercon is a place where you'll have a wonderful time and something to look back on and talk about for a good long time to come. This year's was no exception. From Friday night, when the pre-conference partying started, through all day Saturday with its official program and banquet and its unofficial gab-fests, and well into Sunday evening there was never a lull. In fact, like most regional and national science fiction fan affairs, there was so much unofficial fun and

visiting that it was hard gathering everyone together for the morning sessions.

By Saturday noon the Hotel Commodore was swarming with fans. Centrally located and only a block from the LASFS clubroom, it was an ideal place to pack in the people, both local and out of town, who took rooms for the festivities.

Saturday afternoon the conference got under way with introductions of prominent professionals and fans who were in attendance. (About 200 fans were there at one time or another during the weekend, and there were 147 at the Banquet.) Just about everyone was there by the time the program started, and the meeting hall was quite packed.

After everyone had been introduced the program proper began with a panel discussion on the subject, "Science Fiction—Is It Fun or

Function?" Three men in three different phases of the stf field comprised the panel: Chad Oliver, professional science fiction writer; Dave Fox, critic and reviewer; and Sam Sackett, editor of *Fantastic Worlds*. Sackett argued from the point of view that science fiction should be fun, that entertaining its audience is its most important function. Dave Fox spoke of its bringing science to the layman and extrapolating from today's facts through science to the facts of tomorrow. Chad, on the other hand, held that fun and function cannot be separated, that a good story serves a purpose and entertains as well, and that it isn't good unless it does both.

After the panel I wandered off to explore the art exhibit. At any science fiction get-together you'll find some really good art—the covers and illustrations donated for auction by the professional magazines as well as work by local artists. Here, though, there was a special additional display. A Mel Hunter collection.

LASFS member Mel Hunter is one of the better newcomer young cover artists in the field. And here was the whole range of his works—his covers, his older, experimental work. And perhaps the most impressive of all, his paintings of star systems such as the spiral nebula and his paintings of our own solar system. Pictures like these bring astronomy home to you as a dozen books will not.

Mel said as much during his convention address. He spoke of the way artists have helped in other fields, the way artists have en-

tered industry as advertisers and popularizers of otherwise rather dull products. He doesn't see why art cannot do as much for the theoretical sciences. In astronomy, for example, the science artist could depict the life cycle of a star, or the latest theories on planetary evolution, or the many different possible planetary systems. Mel himself has done just that, in his paintings of red giants and white dwarfs, of freezing planets and the jagged landscapes of Jupiter's moons, of the great, distant galaxies among which our own galaxy is only one of many.

**A**N important feature of a science fiction convention or conference is the banquet. Here fans get together to eat and visit and listen, and usually the banquet is something they'll be talking about for months after the get-together is over. This year's Westercon was no exception. The speaker was Gerald Heard, author of *"Are Other Worlds Watching?"* and many other books, and head of the *Civilian Saucer Investigation Committee*. His topic for the address was "Is Science . . . Fiction?" He spoke on the possibility of our being visited by intelligent beings from other planets, and also discussed endocrinology as it would apply to a race's being peaceful or warlike or otherwise characterized. Gerald Heard is a fascinating and forceful speaker, albeit a somewhat controversial one. Were his theories on eugenics to be applied to the human race you get to wondering who would select the fit—and who the fit would be.

One of the highlights of the conference came on Sunday afternoon, when Dr. Robert S. Richardson, equally well known to fans as an astronomer and as a science fiction writer (under the name of Philip Latham) gave a talk titled "It's About Time." And time is exactly what the talk was about. Dr. Richardson discussed the ways in which time is measured astronomically, and the ways in which the measurement of time intervals varies, seasonally, and also slowly over the milleniums with the change of the earth's rotation. Time is something most people either take for granted or wax most philosophical over, so it was most interesting to hear a speech on its empirical measurements—the earth's rotation and revolution about the sun and the orbits of the other planets being, you might say, the master yardsticks we use in its determination.

Other features on the program during the weekend were a discussion of current science fiction books by some of the writers and other professionals present, talks by various fans and pros, and the auction. The auction, of course, is another of the principle features of an stf convention. The artwork and the manuscripts donated either by the publishing houses or the creators themselves are auctioned off to the collectors and fans in the audience, with the proceeds going to help pay convention expenses. At the Westercon a wide variety of paintings and interior illustrations were auctioned off, and Madge contributed quite a few.

Sunday evening as the program drew to a close there were two of

the real high spots of the entire weekend. One was Chad Oliver's talk on science fiction, its implications and its future, and his restatement of that old but ever valuable saying that the proper study of mankind is man. In fiction as in fact. To Chad, the mutant or the robot or the alien is incidental; it is man who is important and significant; it is man who will be the subject of the best science fiction.

The other high spot of the convention's close—Ray Bradbury. Old-time LASFS member and onetime LASFS fan, a Westercon wouldn't be a Westercon without him. I remember him at the Westercon III, the one that the Outlander Society sponsored, reading his then new and unpublished story "The Pedestrian." This time he read another new and unpublished story—a tremendous satire on the avant garde, not to mention the Great American Culture. It's called "The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse," and when you get a chance, for heaven's sake don't miss a chance to read it. It's wonderful.

Of course, about half the fun of a science fiction gathering never appears on the program. You find it in all sorts of places — off in some corner of the hotel lobby where a half dozen fans who have been carrying on a fanzine by correspondence finally meet in person, or in a coffee shop late at night where two or three people are propounding *their* theories of what science fiction ought to be all at once, or (and this is often the most fun of all) in some fan's hotel room late at night, with fifteen or twenty people crowded in and everyone sing-

ing and talking and ignoring the manager's pleading and/or threatening voice on the telephone.

There's the weary face of the elevator operator, as he sees the same half dozen delegates hailing him for the twentieth time in an hour. There are the looks you get from the other guests in the hotel—those who aren't fans but merely wanted a place to sleep. Most of the looks are indulgent; a few are envious . . . (And some are downright murderous.)

There are the fans who have never been among other fans before. Sometimes I think they have the best time of all. They wander about talking to the people whose stories they've read and whose pictures they've admired, and they meet other fans who have been in the field for years and whose attitudes have consequently changed. And it's all new to these fans, and all quite wonderful, and though they resolve they'll come again next year, and the year after that, they know, deep down inside, that it will never be quite the same again.

And it never is. But it's always fun and always the high spot of the year. Convention time . . .

Now to the fanzines.

\* \* \*

**THE JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION:** 50c; Charles Freudenthal, 1331 W. Newport Ave., Chicago 13, Ill. Editors Charles Freudenthal and Edward Wood have put a tremendous amount of time and effort into this magazine. The quality shows.

The Journal is a literary periodical, its pages devoted to critical analyses of its field, science fic-

tion. All aspects of this field are dissected here. Science fiction is here looked at both in general and in particular. The broad trends are studied, and the individual writer or artist is studied too. Style and technique are discussed, but you'll find more material dealing with *why* the artist creates as he does, how much he follows a trend or fights it. And you'll find the old argument about modern science fiction versus yesterday's science fiction—both sides of it.

The authors on the contents page should give you a good indication of what you may expect. Hugo Gernsback, Captain Kenneth Slater and Robert Bloch are just a few of the contributors. If you like serious fiction well enough to pay the price for this beautifully lithoed magazine, I'm sure you'll find it something you'll want to keep and refer too, often, over the years.

\* \* \*

**MOTE:** 5c; bimonthly; Robert Peatrowsky, Box 634, Norfolk, Nebraska. From the editorial called "Re: Mote" to Robert McMillian's little critter on the back cover you will find a lot of fun and entertainment for your nickel. It's certainly worth it.

There are columns, illustrations where people have hair any old color, including green, and a lot of backchat in the letters to the editor column. Also, the anniversary issue, which follows the one I have here, should be around when you read this. It will cost all of—a dime! And have more than twice as much material. Judging from Mote's regular issues, it's one you won't want to miss.

\* \* \*

**FANTASY-TIMES:** 10c; published twice a month; James V Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. If you subscribe to this, the "newspaper of science fiction," you will always know what's going on in the stf field. And you'll know right away, no matter in what part of the country you live in, for Fantasy-Times with its fine reporting coverage and frequent publishing schedule almost always scoops everyone else.

You'll find New York and Chicago and Hollywood news here. You'll learn what new science fiction or fantasy magazines are coming out, who'll be editing them, what their policies will be. You'll learn what magazines are folding, too! You'll hear about movie or TV or radio science fiction shows—and often you'll read critical reviews of a movie production before the movie is even publicized in your town. And you'll hear about all the new books.

No matter where it comes from, the United States or abroad, if it's about science fiction or fantasy, Fantasy-Times will cover it. Read F-T and keep up with the field.

\* \* \*

**OMEGA:** 15c; Bob Trippner, c/o Keith Joseph, 105 Richland Ave., San Francisco, Calif. Here's a mimeoed fanzine that contains a good bit of everything. It has humor, both in its stories and its articles. It has serious fiction, articles, poetry. And at least on the issue I have here, one of the best cover sketches I've seen in a long time.

It's a simple cover scene, really.

The bigger alien, or BEM, or whatever you wish to call him, has his arm protectively around the smaller. Two of a kind, their expressions seem to say. But they're looking rather dubiously at each other. Perhaps they just saw an Earthman . . .

Helen Vasquez' story, "Mang Poison," is written from the point of view of another kind of alien, a cruel and ruthless creature who lives to kill and is not gregarious even among its own kind. It stalks unfamiliar prey—Earthmen—and is shot by them, and now it is dying alone and silent because to appeal to its own kind would only hasten its death. And it wonders about the intra-species friendliness of the Earthmen.

Also, Jim Kepner writes a provocative article on "Great Books—S. F. Style," in which he suggests that fans get together for serious literary discussions on the science fiction field. He suggests that these really be discussions, and not merely lectures by the one or two members who have actually read the books. A good idea, for those who take their stf seriously.

\* \* \*

**THE SPACEWARPER:** 25c; quarterly; Charles Nuetzel, 16452 Moorpark St., Encino, Calif. This fanzine always has eye-arresting covers, and this issue of it is no exception. The illo is of a spaceship, three spheres linked together, and seeing it you're reminded of the very latest in space stations—spheres that look like electrons in a high school chemistry book, connecting tunnels like the bonds linking those electrons . . .

In the issue I have here there's a wonderfully special feature. It's an article by A. E. Van Vogt! He writes on "Science Fiction for the Female of the Species," and comments on the change in reading habits among the many girls who now are stf enthusiasts. A few years ago, he writes, he would have been surprised to find a girl who read science fiction.

(A few years ago teachers were shocked to find anyone reading it, but they shook their heads especially sadly when confiscating the brightly-covered magazines from a girl.)

Van goes on to mention the conservativeness of so much of the contemporary magazine field — the facts that it won't face, the implications it prefers not to see. And he contrasts this conservativeness with the science fiction world, where if a spaceship design is wanted a hundred writers try to design it—and where, eventually, one or more of those ships will be a paper prototype of the real model of tomorrow.

An excellent article. Also in the issue there's fan fiction by John Davidson and H. R. Karl, Eleanor Rosch's book review department, and some very unusual artwork. I'd suggest that you write to Editor Nuetzel and request this particular issue.

\* \* \*

**SCIENCE FANTASY BULLETIN:** 20c; bimonthly; Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd., Apt. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio. Here you'll always find some of the most enjoyable reading in the amateur fantasy field. This big mimeoed zine

has good writers—both fan and professional—and some really controversial articles for you to sink your teeth into.

The cover is an eye-stopping bit of fantasy art. It's a creature, rather resembling a gnarled tree trunk, with projecting arms, legs, noses, mouths, and eyes in various numbers. It's reading two magazines and smoking a pipe with three of its faces; the others are either asleep or contemplating the scenery.

A very good fanzine I'm sure you'll like.

\* \* \*

**VULCAN:** 15c; quarterly; Peter Graham, 138 Laidley St., San Francisco, Calif. Here's another new fanzine, mimeoed, with a wide range of subject matter. The index is divided as follows: Serious constructive stories, Fan-humor stories, Serious constructive poems, Fan-humor poem, and Features (all lumped in together, I guess.)

There's Terry Carr's story (serious) "Decision is Space." It's about a space-ship carrying an ambassador who may be able to avert a war, and what happens when contagious disease breaks out in the ship.

Here, too, although not so listed, you'll find both serious and humorous drawings. There's David Rike with his vampires, especially the picture wherein a young'un in turned-up coat collar and pulled-down hatbrim sneaks up on a woman, his knife ready. Offstage is the caption—"Henry, leave your mother alone. The meat shortage isn't that bad."

And a lot of other ridiculous sit-

uations you'll enjoy.

\* \* \*

PERHAPS: bimonthly; L. J. Harding, 510 Drummond St., Carlton, N3, Vic., Australia. Editor Harding will gladly trade you a copy for a copy of a U. S. professional science fiction magazine. Send it direct to the editor, please.

*Perhaps* is a new fanzine, and a very good one too. Dick Jensson's cover is exceptionally fine. Among the articles there's quite complete coverage on Australian and world fandom. Capt. Kenneth Slater of Operation Fantast writes his autobiography in "A Portrait of BNF" (Big Name Fan). H. J. Campbell, the editor of the British magazine *Authentic Science Fiction*, writes on some similarities and differences among Australian, British, and American sf fans. Bob Silverberg of Brooklyn writes on "American and World Fandom."

Even though they're a long way from the source of most science fiction, and even though they seem plagued by trouble with the Customs Office over the science fiction they do import, the fans down under are determined to be an active group. And a most interesting group to read about, too.

\* \* \*

ECLIPSE: 10c; bimonthly; Raymond Thompson, 410 S. 4th. St., Norfolk, Nebraska. You'll find some interesting fan fun and fan fiction in this hectographed zine. First off in the issue I have here are the winners of last issue's contest: tell us what the creature in the illustration is, how it lives, etc. The winners, Don Cantin, Bobby Stewart, and Daryl Sharp, all came up

with different answers—respectively, a quatt, a jovian egoboo, and an aedipus preposterous from Mercury.

Then there's Celia Block's story, "Professor Matthews and the Bug-Eyed Monsters," all about a poor professor trembling for his job because the rest of the faculty has discovered he writes science fiction . . .

\* \* \*

VARIANT WORLD: 15c; published every six weeks; Sheldon Deretchin, 1234 Utica Ave., Brooklyn 3, N. Y. This is a rather light hearted fanzine, the cover on the current issue showing a ghost thumbing a ride on a passing comet to the Philadelphia Convention.

There's a story by Martin Clark called "Star Matter" with a rather different account of the alien-landing-on-Earth theme. His alien ship comes from a white dwarf star, and its inhabitants are so different from terrestrials that even their time sense is different. To them an Earth year is only a second or two . . .

Unfortunately the story stops here, at the very point where a really fascinating yarn might have begun.

\* \* \*

PACIFIC ROCKET SOCIETY BULLETIN: 25c; monthly; Freddie Curtis, 428 S. Verdugo Rd., Glendale 5, Calif. This isn't a fanzine. It wouldn't be of interest to you unless you already have a serious interest in rocketry or astronautics. But if you are interested in the technical aspects of these sciences of the age of space flight, you'll find valuable information here.



The Bulletin is divided into three sections. The first covers club news, meeting reports, and reports of club activities. The second includes articles on astronautics and related subjects. And the third covers the technical activities of the society—the actual design, construction, instrumentation, static testing and firing of rockets.

And if you're really interested in

rockets you might be interested in joining the society as a corresponding member.

\* \* \*

Well, that's all the fanzines for this time. Remember, send your fanzines for review to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next month . . .

*Mari Wolf*

**Your subscription to IMAGINATION begins on page 162!**

— DON'T FIGHT CROWDED NEWSSTANDS —



**"Consider yourselves invaded!"**

# Letters from the Readers

*In the August issue of Madge we announced a contest for the best three letters (in the opinion of our editorial staff) on the subject, WHY I READ SCIENCE FICTION. The prizes: 1st, the original cover for the Heinlein story this issue, prepared for framing; 2nd, the original Heinlein manuscript and the original interior artwork for the story; 3rd, \$25.00 in cash and a year's subscription to IMAGINATION. We would like to state that it is unfortunate that every letter could not win a prize; we would also like to announce that the interest in this informal letter contest was most satisfying and enlightening to your editors. Over a thousand readers responded—and that, we believe, is something of a record in the field for reader-participation. It is also proof to us that science fiction readers by and large take their subject seriously. How did we judge the letters? Many of them of course expressed similar feelings and reasons; we chose therefore from the*

*standpoint of what we considered sincerity of expression. This was no easy task—since all were sincere. However, since there had to be only three winners the following letters took the top places in our opinion. You may note that they express basic approaches to science fiction: ethereal, imaginative, and scientific. A good cross-section, to our mind at least, as to why science fiction is read and liked. Our congratulations to the winners, and sincere thanks to all of you who participated.*

## FIRST PRIZE WINNER

Dear Editor:

From the time I discovered there were stars in the heavens I have never ceased to wonder at their beauty and majesty. My favorite pastime on a summer evening was to lie on the grass and gaze at them with awe. Even today I never fail to look up at the stars if I chance to be out on a clear evening.

There has always been something about a star bejeweled sky that fills a part of my being with a yearning that cannot be put into words. In my extreme youth I used to think of myself as having been born centuries too soon and so must always be Earthbound. As I grew older, this yearning melted, but it will always exist.

Since I discovered science fiction at a very early age—10—I have found that it fills a special niche for me. It is my attainment of the as yet unattainable . . .

Margaret Kaye

74 Copen St.

Dorchester 24, Mass.

*Margaret Kaye is 29, married and the mother of three children. Besides her family and science fiction, her interests include art, music, science, and good healthy humor. A down-to-earth young woman with a dream in her eye!*

## SECOND PRIZE WINNER

Dear Editor:

Why do I read science fiction?

Perhaps it is because of the variety I find in the stories. What other branch of literature can travel so far imaginatively—up and down the spiral of time, across the universe, into other dimensions . . . Other literary fields are chained to the small space of time that is within the grasp of man's feeble memory, or are bound irrevocably to this tiny mote of dust called Earth, in a great cosmos.

Science fiction is bound only by the rule that a story should not violate any proven, natural law. This and the author's imagination

are the only limits placed on a story. Science fiction is truly *creative* writing!

Also, science fiction is a branch of literature where one really can feel at home . . . There is a warm, friendly feeling among its readers, exemplified in the letter columns and editorials of science fiction magazines.

To me, science fiction offers variety, friendliness, educational value, and entertainment!

Bill Hohman

619 Main St.

Bennington, Vermont

*Bill Hohman is a senior in high school, and has been reading science fiction for two years.*

## THIRD PRIZE WINNER

Dear Editor;

I read science fiction because in my opinion science fiction, as a literature, can be the basic foundation for developing present day scientific theories, inventions, and discoveries. The field of science fiction is so broad that it can and does include all the specialized fields of the physical and social sciences, and in many ways ties the two together.

I feel that reading science fiction enables one to become familiar with the various sciences, affording a working knowledge of the basic principles of each.

I also feel that science fiction encourages scientific thinking and investigation, and prepares the layman for future work, enabling him to properly understand and evaluate scientific developments.

At least, science fiction has de-

veloped in me a desire to learn about Man and his Universe.

James Younge, Jr.  
2744 N. Kimball Ave.  
Chicago 47, Ill.

*James Younge is 23, married, and a law student. Besides science fiction his hobbies include guns, stamps, and fishing. And also included now, contest winner! Again, congratulations to the winners, thanks to everyone for participating, and now on to the forum for this month! . . . . . with*

## TOP MAN—TOP MAG

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Since September of last year I have ranked IMAGINATION about even with *Galaxy*. But with those Geoff St. Reynard stories you've been running, I think you've pulled ahead in the race for stf leadership.

In my opinion St. Reynard (THE BUTTONED SKY, August issue) is the finest feature novel writer in the field today, bar none. His last three novels (ARMAGEDDON, 1970—October 1952; THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE — April 1953; THE BUTTONED SKY—August 1953) have been nothing short of sensational, with all approximately equal in quality. The more I read of his work, the better I'll like IMAGINATION!

Nelson P. Kempsey  
6042 N. Oak  
Temple City, Cal.

*We've been in touch with Geoff, prodding him to finish his new novel for Madge. We'll let you know as soon as it's completed . . . with*

KLEENEX YET!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The August issue was a striking one, due in most part to the colorful and intriguing cover painting by McCauley, and the equally colorful and intriguing novel by Geoff St. Reynard, THE BUTTONED SKY. That title caught me from the first moment I saw the issue; as neat a one as I've seen in a long time.

I must say that I agree with much of what Lawrence Stark has to say in the letter section on editorial policy. One particular incident illustrates why I virtually stopped buying Madge for a long time. Back in the February 1951 issue you published a story which I consider one of the greatest science-fantasies ever written, REVOLT OF THE DEVIL STAR, by Ross Rocklynne. In a succeeding issue there was a letter from a fan objecting to the story on the grounds that it was puzzling. In your reply you as much as said: "Stories with ideas, stories that make our readers think, may not be welcome to the majority. We'll watch out for that in the future." You actually sounded apologetic for having featured a story that required a little concentration to understand. After that my purchases of Madge were infrequent. Every issue still gets a thorough paging before I buy it. Of course, certain authors can sell it: Geoff St. Reynard could sell me a box of kleenex if his name were printed on the outside! Charles F. Myers has almost the same attraction. And also, Kris Neville, whose novels have been very good.

But otherwise, not a thing of sufficient interest. Madge's front covers—quite good, but far from selling the mag on their own merits. Back covers—excellent, if only they were printed in black, rather than blue! Fiction—often interesting but mostly uninspiring, and sometimes pure hack, such as Dwight V. Swain's mumblings.

I expect my meagre accumulation of Madge to increase in the future; you always come through with a few memorable items, enough to keep the magazine above average in the overall stf picture. And Heinlein is liable to put you back in my running!

Robert E. Briney  
561 W. Western Ave.  
Muskegon, Mich.

*You kind of put words in our mouth when you speak of the DEVIL STAR yarn, Bob. Actually, what we meant was simply that the story lacked reader identification—that is, there wasn't a single "live" creature in it, certainly no identifiable background to hang your hat on. We said we'd watch it in the future, yes, but we meant simply that we'd try and keep the stories less subtle in nature, but certainly as interesting—and more so! As to St. Reynard, Myers, and Neville, more feature yarns coming up! And oh yes, Dwight V. Swain too!*  
. . . . . wkh

## ACTIVATING RESPONSE!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is the first fan letter I've ever written, so you can probably realize what an activating response IMAGINATION has caused. I

thoroughly enjoy Madge, and after just completing my reading of the August issue, I thought that THE BUTTONED SKY was notably good. However, the story I enjoyed more than any other was THE FIST OF SHIVA by Daniel F. Galouye in the May issue.

Getting back to the August number, I liked all of the other stories, but just as I was sinking my teeth into Zenna Henderson's THE SUBSTITUTE, it ended. That was a good place to end the story considering the depth of the plot, but I would like to see more plotting in that trend in the future.

Elton D. Horum  
5445½ Hollywood Blvd.  
Los Angeles 27, Cal.

*We'll bet Zenna will be back soon with another yarn you'll like . . . wkh*

## SUCH "STUFF" INDEED!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Herewith the first letter to an editor!—And most probably my last, unless, of course, it is about your wonderful magazine. I could write forever about IMAGINATION, a truly great science fiction magazine. I never put Madge down until I have read every story in the issue. In the August number I'd like to tell Geoff St. Reynard how much I enjoyed his THE BUTTONED SKY.

Main reason for this letter, I guess, is to tell you of a funny incident that happened this month when I went to the newsstand to buy the August issue. A friend of mine had stopped by for a newspaper and he looked quite surprised

to see me pay for a copy of Madge. He said: "I am surprised to see an intelligent young woman like you reading such stuff!" I looked back at him, rather coldly, and replied: "Did you ever stop to think that this 'stuff' might be making me intelligent?" Perhaps I'll meet him again next month—and catch him buying a copy of Madge too!

Bette Wilson  
413 Monroe St.  
Mobile, Ala.

*Let us know if you do . . . wlh*

### CALLING CANFEN!

Dear Bill:

Good, excellent, and enjoyable. That description fits the August issue of Madge—outside of the cover, that is. While there is nothing basically wrong with the scene, the pastel shades give the impression that the painting is unfinished. Only my opinion, of course.

THE BUTTONED SKY was an adventure story with a few aliens thrown in to make it acceptable stf. The plot was old and worn out—so I feel I am losing my mind because I enjoyed the darn thing from the start to finish!

If this letter should see print I would like to state that I am forming a Canadian Science Fiction Correspondence club. I'd like to see the Canfen creating active interest and also discovering new fans in Canada. So come on, you Canfen—write me!

Frederick B. Christoff  
39 Cameron St., S.  
Kitchener, Ont., Canada.

*So dull you found it exciting,*

*huh, Fred? That's our boy St. Reynard. Watch coming issues for another of his "sweet tasting" lemons! . . . . . wlh*

### BUT GOOD AND SOLID!

Dear wlh:

Madge is not the best science fiction magazine being published, nor is it terrific, wonderful, sensational, etc. It is nothing more than a good solid science fiction magazine with some excellent stories, some bad stories, and a lot of average stories. Your lead novels are always good and entertaining, but the shorts seem to be getting worse as the novels get better.

Madge has a very good and friendly editorial policy, and some very good artwork. The August issue cover, for example, was the most striking cover I've ever seen on any magazine, and that is saying a lot. The cartoons, book reviews, letters, and film flashes are all very good, but I don't care too much for FANDORA'S BOX or TOMORROW'S SCIENCE on the back cover.

Concerning authors, Geoff St. Reynard, Kris Neville, and Milton Lesser are tops, with Zenna Henderson and Daniel F. Galouye following close behind. Now to close with a question on writers: Why don't you get authors such as Simak, Sturgeon, Asimov, Bradbury, and Van Vogt?

Larry Cheek  
Rt. 1.

Chapel Hill, N. C.

*Good and solid, that's Madge!  
As to some of the writers you*

*ask about, Madge has printed stories in the past by Bradbury and Sturgeon. As to the others, if they submit a good enough story, we'll buy it. Fair enough? ...wlh*

### DREAM DIMENSION?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is my first fan letter, and while I don't know exactly how to go about writing it, I have been reading science fiction for the past seven years. And during that time a question has been bothering me, which I'd like to pose as food for thought.

Could it be that our imagination is the much written-about fourth dimension? Could it be something as simple—and complex!—as our dreams? The only time a person seems to get "out of this world" as we know it is in a dream. Everyone at some time or another has "dreamt" he was in some fantastic place. . .

Anyway, aside from this, I read IMAGINATION every month because I just plain old-fashioned like the stories!

Louise Holzrichter  
3017 W. Diversey Ave.  
Chicago 47, Ill.

*A good question, Louise. Our dreams the window to other worlds? A fantastic thought—but possible! . . . . . wlh*

### A BIG HOORAY

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I started reading the August issue of IMAGINATION with the idea of reading 15 or 20 pages and then doing some work on my fan

magazine. Well, I finished every page of THE BUTTONED SKY before I could put the book down. Sir, you are to blame for a behind schedule fanzine! All I have to say is that if you continue to publish stories like this, fans will be forced to start reading science fiction magazines again!

THE SUBSTITUTE by Zenna Henderson was number two for the issue. Let's see more of Zenna. Charles V. DeVet's story was good enough to rank a close third. While you can't say very much for the cover's content, it was very well done. A pleasing blend of colors.

FANDORA'S BOX, of course, always draws raves from this reader. Now to the letter section. This I love. I agree with Tom Piper on the book reviews. Down with them! Instead of using the space for more letters, use it for 'zine reviews . . .

And hooray for you, Bill. That is, your answer to Daryl Sharp. If the prozines keep up the attitude of "let's go slick" and to hell with the fans, we'll be in a bad way. Again I say, hooray!

Val Walker  
6438 E. 4th Pl.  
Tulsa, Okla.

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Perhaps the attitude you suggest is not so much one of "let's go slick" as "let's go high brow." It's a funny thing, but a good percentage of the stories we read (submissions to *Madge* which we reject, and those in other magazines) are either way over our simple minds, or, more probably, slanted toward some theoretical audience in an ivory tower who, while not understanding them either, nod sagely to one another and aver, "this is really adult!" If any writers are reading this, and you have been wondering what it takes to hit *IMAGINATION*, the answer is simple. Open your story with a dramatic situation—and carry on from there with plenty of action, believable characters, and a resolved problem at the end. A good indication of what we consider top-notch stories (and the readers too!) are our lead stories each issue. Look them over, boys; they're not high-brow, low-brow, or middle-brow. They're well-plotted yarns with a fast pace. Dissertations in sociology, technology, and sadism are not our meat. Unless they are an after-thought to a darn good story! And even then keep the philosophizing to a minimum. Too many writers slant their stories toward editors, rather than readers. *Madge* is one magazine where the readers always come first—and where the editor is one of them! . . .  
wlh

## A PLAUSIBLE STORY

Dear Mr. Hamling:

It isn't very often that an author can write a plausible story on fly-

ing saucers. Geoff St. Reynard's *THE BUTTONED SKY* in the August issue is an exception. I wouldn't be at all surprised if it comes out in hard covers within a year. This is one of the best—if not the best—flying saucer stories I have ever read.

Both the cover and the interior illustrations were lousy. If McCauley meant for the people to look like *Homo Sapiens* he didn't succeed. As for the illos, it's about time you put some pressure on the art department for better work!

Of the short stories, *THE SUBSTITUTE* by Zenna Henderson was the only really good one. If this is an example, it won't be long before Zenna Henderson is one of the top writers in the field.

Make *FANTASY FILM FLASHES* into a monthly feature if you can. This and *FANDORA'S BOX* are the two (next to the editorial) most interesting features of *Madge*. And you lucky dog—now you have Heinlein for *Madge*!

John Truax  
1102 9th St.  
Rapid City, S. D.

*Correction, John. You're the lucky one—Madge keeps giving you nothing but the best! . . . As to the artwork, most of the readers seem to think Madge does just fine in that department. How about it, gang! . . . with*

## THREE CHEERS!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Three cheers for *Madge*! She's done it again. Another great St. Reynard novel! That guy is absolutely great I just can't help ad-



miring THE BUTTONED SKY. A masterpiece!

Three more cheers for Madge's editorial policy, as stated in the answer to Larry Stark's letter. He must be something of a high hat! The August cover was not up to standard, I thought. Let's have more like the June issue. There was a cover to top all covers! . . . In closing, an urgent plea: Couldn't you get a new story by the Master himself—Bradbury? You've now got Heinlein to go along with Galouye, St. Reynard, and Dick. If you can get a new Bradbury yarn you'll have Ray Palmer shaking in his boots!

Peter Kreeft  
26 Richardson Ave.  
Haledon, N. J.

Hey, Palmer, you got some boots?  
. . . wh

## WHITE CHECKS IN

Dear Bill:

So far I've only had a chance to read the shorts in the August issue, but they were all enjoyable. Of course, I've devoured the editorial, FANDORA'S BOX, etc.

Trying to get me to talk you into printing a Heinlein story when you had plans for one (probably) since Hector was a whelp. That was a nice way to get a guy on his knees! Well, thanks, at any rate. Why not get Myers off his hands and give us another?

A/1C James White  
AF 19247861

2275th Base Serv. Sqdrn.  
Beale AFB, Cal.

Myers? Coming right up! How's that for service? . . . All for now, gang, see you October 30th . . . wh

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Another scan  
by  
cape1736

